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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE CLAVERINGS.

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1867.

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THE CLAVERINGS.

CHAPTER I.

Julia Brabazon.

THE gardens of Clavering Park were removed some three hundred yards from the large, square, sombre-looking stone mansion which was the country-house of Sir Hugh Clavering, the eleventh baronet of that name; and in these gardens, which had but little of beauty to recommend them, I will introduce my readers to two of the personages with whom I wish to make them acquainted in the following story. It was now the end of August, and the parterres, beds, and bits of lawn were dry, disfigured, and almost ugly, from the effects of a long drought. In gardens to which care and labour are given abundantly, flower-beds will be pretty, and grass will be green, let the weather be what it may; but care and labour were but scantily bestowed on the Clavering Gardens, and everything was yellow, adust, harsh, and dry. Over the burnt turf, towards a gate that led to the house, a lady was walking, and by her side there walked a gentleman.

"You are going in, then, Miss Brabazon," said the gentleman, and it was very manifest from his tone that he intended to convey some deep reproach in his words.

"Of course I am going in," said the lady. "You asked me to walk with you, and I refused. You have now waylaid me, and therefore I shall escape, — unless I am prevented by violence." As she spoke she stood still for a moment, and looked into his face with a smile which seemed to indicate that if such violence were used, within rational bounds, she would not feel herself driven to great anger.

But though she might be inclined to be playful, he was by no means in that mood. "And why did you refuse me when I asked you?" said he.

"For two reasons: partly because I thought it better to avoid any conversation with you —"

"That is civil to an old friend."

"But chiefly," and now as she spoke she drew herself up, and dismissed the smile from her face, and allowed her eyes to fall upon the ground; "but chiefly because I thought that Lord Ongar would prefer that I should not roam alone about Clavering Park with any young gentleman while I am down here; and that he might specially object to my roaming with you, were he to know that you and I were — old acquaintances. Now I have been very frank, Mr. Clavering, and I think that that ought to be enough."

"You are afraid of him already, then?"

"I am afraid of offending any one whom I love, and especially any one to whom I owe any duty."

"Enough! indeed it is not. From what you know of me do you think it likely that that will be enough?" He was now standing in front of her, between her and the gate, and she made no effort to leave him.

"And what is it you want? I suppose you do not

mean to fight Lord Ongar, and that if you did you would not come to me."

"Fight him! No; I have no quarrel with him. Fighting him would do no good."

"None in the least; and he would not fight if you were to ask him; and you could not ask without being false to me."

"I should have had an example for that, at any rate."

"That's nonsense, Mr. Clavering. My falsehood, if you should choose to call me false, is of a very different nature, and is pardonable by all laws known in the world."

"You are a jilt, — that is all."

"Come, Harry, don't use hard words," and she put her hand kindly upon his arm. "Look at me, such as I am, and at yourself, and then say whether anything but misery could come of a match between you and me. Our ages by the register are the same, but I am ten years older than you by the world. I have two hundred a year, and I owe at this moment six hundred pounds. You have, perhaps, double as much, and would lose half of that if you married. You are an usher at a school."

"No, madam, I am not an usher at a school."

"Well, well, you know I don't mean to make you angry."

"At the present moment, I am a schoolmaster, and if I remained so, I might fairly look forward to a liberal income. But I am going to give that up."

"You will not be more fit for matrimony because you are going to give up your profession. Now Lord Ongar has — heaven knows what; — perhaps sixty thousand a year."

"In all my life I never heard such effrontery, — such barefaced shameless worldliness!"

"Why should I not love a man with a large income?"

"He is old enough to be your father."

"He is thirty-six, and I am twenty-four."

"Thirty-six!"

"There is the Peerage for you to look at. But, my dear Harry, do you not know that you are perplexing me and yourself too, for nothing? I was fool enough when I came here from Nice, after papa's death, to let you talk nonsense to me for a month or two."

"Did you or did you not swear that you loved me?"

"Oh, Mr. Clavering, I did not imagine that your strength would have condescended to take such advantage over the weakness of a woman. I remember no oaths of any kind, and what foolish assertions I may have made, I am not going to repeat. It must have become manifest to you during these two years that all that was a romance. If it be a pleasure to you to look back to it, of that pleasure I cannot deprive you. Perhaps I also may sometimes look back. But I shall never speak of that time again; and you, if you are as noble as I take you to be, will not speak of it either. I know you would not wish to injure me."

"I would wish to save you from the misery you are bringing on yourself."

"In that you must allow me to look after myself. Lord Ongar certainly wants a wife, and I intend to be true to him, — and useful."

"How about love?"

"And to love him, sir. Do you think that no man can win a woman's love, unless he is filled to the brim with poetry, and has a neck like Lord Byron, and is handsome like your worship? You are very handsome, Harry, and you, too, should go into the market and make the best of yourself. Why should you not learn to love some nice girl that has money to assist you?"

"Julia!"

"No, sir; I will not be called Julia. If you do, I will be insulted, and leave you instantly. I may call you Harry, as being so much younger, — though we were born in the same month, and as a sort of cousin. But I shall never do that after to-day."

"You have courage enough, then, to tell me that you have not ill-used me?"

"Certainly I have. Why, what a fool you would have me be! Look at me, and tell me whether I am fit to be the wife of such a one as you. By the time you are entering the world, I shall be an old woman, and shall have lived my life. Even if I were fit to be your mate when we were living here together, am I fit, after what I have done and seen during the last two years? Do you think it would really do any good to any one if I were to jilt, as you call it, Lord Ongar, and tell them all, — your cousin, Sir Hugh, and my sister, and your father, — that I was going to keep myself up, and marry you when you were ready for me?"

"You mean to say that the evil is done."

"No, indeed. At the present moment I owe six hundred pounds, and I don't know where to turn for

it, so that my husband may not be dunned for my debts as soon as he has married me. What a wife I should have been for you; — should I not?"

"I could pay the six hundred pounds for you with money that I have earned myself, though you do call me an usher; and perhaps would ask fewer questions about it than Lord Ongar will do with all his thousands."

"Dear Harry, I beg your pardon about the usher. Of course, I know that you are a fellow of your college, and that St. Cuthbert's, where you teach the boys, is one of the grandest schools in England; and I hope you'll be a bishop; nay, — I think you will, if you make up your mind to try for it."

"I have given up all idea of going into the church."

"Then you'll be a judge. I know you'll be great and distinguished, and that you'll do it all yourself. You are distinguished already. If you could only know how infinitely I should prefer your lot to mine! Oh, Harry, I envy you! I do envy you! You have got the ball at your feet, and the world before you, and can win everything for yourself."

"But nothing is anything without your love."

"Psha! Love, indeed. What could I do for you but ruin you? You know it as well as I do; but you are selfish enough to wish to continue a romance which would be absolutely destructive to me, though for a while it might afford a pleasant relaxation to your graver studies. Harry, you can choose in the world. You have divinity, and law, and literature, and art. And if debarred from love now by the exigencies of

labour, you will be as fit for love in ten years' time as you are at present."

"But I do love now."

"Be a man, then, and keep it to yourself. Love is not to be our master. You can choose, as I say; but I have had no choice, — no choice but to be married well, or to go out like a snuff of a candle. I don't like the snuff of a candle, and, therefore, I am going to be married well."

"And that suffices?"

"It must suffice. And why should it not suffice? You are very uncivil, cousin, and very unlike the rest of the world. Everybody compliments me on my marriage. Lord Ongar is not only rich, but he is a man of fashion, and a man of talent."

"Are you fond of race-horses yourself?"

"Very fond of them."

"And of that kind of life?"

"Very fond of it. I mean to be fond of everything that Lord Ongar likes. I know that I can't change him, and therefore I shall not try."

"You are right there, Miss Brabazon."

"You mean to be impertinent, sir; but I will not take it so. This is to be our last meeting in private, and I won't acknowledge that I am insulted. But it must be over now, Harry; and here I have been pacing round and round the garden with you, in spite of my refusal just now. It must not be repeated, or things will be said which I do not mean to have ever said of me. Good-by, Harry."

"Good-by, Julia."

"Well, for that once let it pass. And remember this; I have told you all my hopes, and my one trouble.

I have been thus open with you because I thought it might serve to make you look at things in a right light. I trust to your honour as a gentleman to repeat nothing that I have said to you."

"I am not given to repeat such things as those."

"I'm sure you are not. And I hope you will not misunderstand the spirit in which they have been spoken. I shall never regret what I have told you now, if it tends to make you perceive that we must both regard our past acquaintance as a romance, which must, from the stern necessity of things, be treated as a dream which we have dreamt, or a poem which we have read."

"You can treat it as you please."

"God bless you, Harry; and I will always hope for your welfare, and hear of your success with joy. Will you come up and shoot with them on Thursday?"

"What, with Hugh? No; Hugh and I do not hit it off together. If I shot at Clavering I should have to do it as a sort of head-keeper. It's a higher position, I know, than that of an usher, but it doesn't suit me."

"Oh, Harry! that is so cruel! But you will come up to the house. Lord Ongar will be there on the thirty-first; the day after to morrow, you know."

"I must decline even that temptation. I never go into the house when Hugh is there, except about twice a year on solemn invitation — just to prevent there being a family quarrel."

"Good-by then," and she offered him her hand.

"Good-by, if it must be so."

"I don't know whether you mean to grace my marriage?"

"Certainly not. I shall be away from Clavering, so that the marriage bells may not wound my ears. For the matter of that, I shall be at the school."

"I suppose we shall meet some day in town."

"Most probably not. My ways and Lord Ongar's will be altogether different, even if I should succeed in getting up to London. If you ever come to see Hermione here, I may chance to meet you in the house. But you will not do that often, the place is so dull and unattractive."

"It is the dearest old park."

"You won't care much for old parks as Lady Ongar."

"You don't know what I may care about as Lady Ongar; but as Julia Brabazon I will now say good-by for the last time." Then they parted, and the lady returned to the great house, while Harry Clavering made his way across the park towards the rectory.

Three years before this scene in the gardens at Clavering Park, Lord Brabazon had died at Nice, leaving one unmarried daughter, the lady to whom the reader has just been introduced. One other daughter he had, who was then already married to Sir Hugh Clavering, and Lady Clavering was the Hermione of whom mention has been already made. Lord Brabazon, whose peerage had descended to him in a direct line from the times of the Plantagenets, was one of those unfortunate nobles, of whom England is burdened with but few, who have no means equal to their rank. He had married late in life, and had died without a male heir. The title which had come from the Plantagenets was now lapsed; and when the last lord died, about four hundred a year was divided between his two daughters. The elder had already made

an excellent match, as regarded fortune, in marrying Sir Hugh Clavering; and the younger was now about to make a much more splendid match in her alliance with Lord Ongar. Of them I do not know that it is necessary to say much more at present.

And of Harry Clavering it perhaps may not be necessary to say much in the way of description. The attentive reader will have already gathered nearly all that should be known of him before he makes himself known by his own deeds. He was the only son of the Reverend Henry Clavering, rector of Clavering, uncle of the present Sir Hugh Clavering, and brother of the last Sir Hugh. The Reverend Henry Clavering, and Mrs. Clavering his wife, and his two daughters, Mary and Fanny Clavering, lived always at Clavering Rectory, on the outskirts of Clavering Park, at a full mile's distance from the house. The church stood in the park, about midway between the two residences. When I have named one more Clavering, Captain Clavering, Captain Archibald Clavering, Sir Hugh's brother, and when I shall have said also that both Sir Hugh and Captain Clavering were men fond of pleasure and fond of money, I shall have said all that I need now say about the Clavering family at large.

Julia Brabazon had indulged in some reminiscence of the romance of her past poetic life when she talked of cousinship between her and Harry Clavering. Her sister was the wife of Harry Clavering's first cousin, but between her and Harry there was no relationship whatever. When old Lord Brabazon had died at Nice she had come to Clavering Park, and had created some astonishment among those who knew Sir Hugh by making good her footing in his establishment. He was

not the man to take up a wife's sister, and make his house her home, out of charity or from domestic love. Lady Clavering, who had been a handsome woman and fashionable withal, no doubt may have had some influence; but Sir Hugh was a man much prone to follow his own courses. It must be presumed that Julia Brabazon had made herself agreeable in the house, and probably also useful. She had been taken to London through two seasons, and had there held up her head among the bravest. And she had been taken abroad, — for Sir Hugh did not love Clavering Park, except during six weeks of partridge-shooting; and she had been at Newmarket with them, and at the house of a certain fast hunting duke with whom Sir Hugh was intimate; and at Brighton with her sister, when it suited Sir Hugh to remain alone at the duke's; and then again up in London, where she finally arranged matters with Lord Ongar. It was acknowledged by all the friends of the two families, and indeed I may say of the three families now — among the Brabazon people, and the Clavering people, and the Courton people, — Lord Ongar's family name was Courton, — that Julia Brabazon had been very clever. Of her and Harry Clavering together no one had ever said a word. If any words had been spoken between her and Hermione on the subject, the two sisters had been discreet enough to manage that they should go no further. In those short months of Julia's romance Sir Hugh had been away from Clavering, and Hermoine had been much occupied in giving birth to an heir. Julia had now lived past her one short spell of poetry, had written her one sonnet, and was prepared for the business of the world.

CHAPTER II.

Harry Clavering chooses his Profession.

HARRY CLAVERING might not be an usher, but, nevertheless, he was home for the holidays. And who can say where the usher ends and the schoolmaster begins? He, perhaps, may properly be called an usher, who is hired by a private schoolmaster to assist himself in his private occupation, whereas Harry Clavering had been selected by a public body out of a hundred candidates, with much real or pretended reference to certificates of qualification. He was certainly not an usher, as he was paid three hundred a year for his work, — which is quite beyond the mark of ushers. So much was certain; but yet the word stuck in his throat and made him uncomfortable. He did not like to reflect that he was home for the holidays.

But he had determined that he would never come home for the holidays again. At Christmas he would leave the school at which he had won his appointment with so much trouble, and go into an open profession. Indeed he had chosen his profession, and his mode of entering it. He would become a civil engineer, and perhaps a land surveyor, and with this view he would enter himself as a pupil in the great house of Beilby and Burton. The terms even had been settled. He was to pay a premium of five hundred pounds and join Mr. Burton, who was settled in the town of Stratton, for twelve months before he placed himself in Mr. Beilby's office in London. Stratton was less than twenty miles from Clavering. It was a comfort to him to think that he could pay this five hundred

pounds out of his own earnings, without troubling his father. It was a comfort, even though he had earned that money by "ushering" for the last two years.

When he left Julia Brabazon in the garden, Harry Clavering did not go at once home to the rectory, but sauntered out all alone into the park, intending to indulge in reminiscences of his past romance. It was all over, that idea of having Julia Brabazon for his love; and now he had to ask himself whether he intended to be made permanently miserable by her worldly falseness, or whether he would borrow something of her worldly wisdom, and agree with himself to look back on what was past as a pleasurable excitement in his boyhood. Of course we all know that really permanent misery was in truth out of the question. Nature had not made him physically or mentally so poor a creature as to be incapable of a cure. But on this occasion he decided on permanent misery. There was about his heart, — about his actual anatomical heart, with its internal arrangement of valves and blood-vessels, — a heavy dragging feel that almost amounted to corporeal pain, and which he described to himself as agony. Why should this rich, debauched, disreputable lord have the power of taking the cup from his lip, the one morsel of bread which he coveted from his mouth, his one ingot of treasure out of his coffer? Fight him! No, he knew he could not fight Lord Ongar. The world was against such an arrangement. And in truth Harry Clavering had so much contempt for Lord Ongar, that he had no wish to fight so poor a creature. The man had had delirium tremens, and was a worn-out miserable object. So at least Harry Clavering was only too ready to believe.

He did not care much for Lord Ongar in the matter. His anger was against her; — that she should have deserted him for a miserable creature, who had nothing to back him but wealth and rank!

There was wretchedness in every view of the matter. He loved her so well, and yet he could do nothing! He could take no step towards saving her or assisting himself. The marriage bells would ring within a month from the present time, and his own father would go to the church and marry them. Unless Lord Ongar were to die before then by God's hand, there could be no escape, — and of such escape Harry Clavering had no thought. He felt a weary, dragging soreness at his heart, and told himself that he must be miserable for ever, — not so miserable but what he would work, but so wretched that the world could have for him no satisfaction.

What could he do? What thing could he achieve so that she should know that he did not let her go from him without more thought than his poor words had expressed? He was perfectly aware that in their conversation she had had the best of the argument, — that he had talked almost like a boy, while she had talked quite like a woman. She had treated him *de haut en bas* with all that superiority which youth and beauty give to a young woman over a very young man. What could he do? Before he returned to the rectory, he had made up his mind what he would do, and on the following morning Julia Brabazon received by the hands of her maid the following note: —

“I think I understood all that you said to me yesterday. At any rate, I understand that you have one trouble left, and that I have the means of curing

it." In the first draft of his letter he said something about ushering, but that he omitted afterwards. "You may be assured that the enclosed is all my own, and that it is entirely at my own disposal. You may also be quite sure of good faith on the part of the lender — H. C." And in this letter he enclosed a cheque for six hundred pounds. It was the money which he had saved since he took his degree, and had been intended for Messrs. Beilby and Burton. But he would wait another two years, — continuing to do his ushering for her sake. What did it matter to a man who must, under any circumstances, be permanently miserable?

Sir Hugh was not yet at Clavering. He was to come with Lord Ongar on the eve of the partridge-shooting. The two sisters, therefore, had the house all to themselves. At about twelve they sat down to breakfast together in a little upstairs chamber adjoining Lady Clavering's own room, Julia Brabazon at that time having her lover's generous letter in her pocket. She knew that it was as improper as it was generous, and that, moreover, it was very dangerous. There was no knowing what might be the result of such a letter should Lord Ongar even know that she had received it. She was not absolutely angry with Harry, but had, to herself, twenty times called him a foolish, indiscreet, dear generous boy. But what was she to do with the cheque? As to that, she had hardly as yet made up her mind when she joined her sister on the morning in question. Even to Hermione she did not dare to tell the fact that such a letter had been received by her.

But in truth her debts were a great torment to her; and yet how trifling they were when compared

with the wealth of the man who was to become her husband in six weeks! Let her marry him, and not pay them, and he probably would never be the wiser. They would get themselves paid almost without his knowledge, perhaps altogether without his hearing of them. But yet she feared him, knowing him to be greedy about money; and, to give her such merit as was due to her, she felt the meanness of going to her husband with debts on her shoulder. She had five thousand pounds of her own; but the very settlement which gave her a noble dower, and which made the marriage so brilliant, made over this small sum in its entirety to her lord. She had been wrong not to tell the lawyer of her trouble when he had brought the paper for her to sign; but she had not told him. If Sir Hugh Clavering had been her own brother there would have been no difficulty, but he was only her brother-in-law, and she feared to speak to him. Her sister, however, knew that there were debts, and on that subject she was not afraid to speak to Hermione.

"Hermie," said she, "what am I to do about this money that I owe? I got a bill from Colclugh's this morning."

"Just because he knows you are going to be married; that's all."

"But how am I to pay him?"

"Take no notice of it till next spring. I don't know what else you can do. You'll be sure to have money when you come back from the Continent."

"You couldn't lend it me; could you?"

"Who? I? Did you ever know me have any money in hand since I was married? I have the name of an allowance, but it is always spent before it comes to me, and I am always in debt."

"Would Hugh — let me have it?"

"What, give it you?"

"Well, it wouldn't be so very much for him. I never asked him for a pound yet."

"I think he would say something you wouldn't like if you were to ask him; but, of course, you can try it if you please."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Lord Ongar should have let you keep your own fortune. It would have been nothing to him."

"Hugh didn't let you keep your own fortune."

"But the money which will be nothing to Lord Ongar was a good deal to Hugh. You're going to have sixty thousand a year, while we have to do with seven or eight. Besides, I hadn't been out in London, and it wasn't likely I should owe much in Nice. He did ask me, and there was something."

"What am I to do, Hermy?"

"Write and ask Lord Ongar to let you have what you want out of your own money. Write to-day, so that he may get your letter before he comes."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I never wrote a word to him yet, and to begin with asking him for money!"

"I don't think he can be angry with you for that."

"I shouldn't know what to say. Would you write it for me, and let me see how it looks?"

This Lady Clavering did; and had she refused to do it, I think that poor Harry Clavering's cheque would have been used. As it was, Lady Clavering wrote the letter to "My dear Lord Ongar," and it was copied and signed by "Yours most affectionately, Julia Brabazon." The effect of this was the receipt of a cheque

for a thousand pounds in a very pretty note from Lord Ongar, which the lord brought with him to Clavering, and sent up to Julia as he was dressing for dinner. It was an extremely comfortable arrangement, and Julia was very glad of the money, — feeling it to be a portion of that which was her own. And Harry's cheque had been returned to him on the day of its receipt. "Of course I cannot take it, and of course you should not have sent it." These words were written on the morsel of paper in which the money was returned. But Miss Brabazon had torn the signature off the cheque, so that it might be safe, whereas Harry Clavering had taken no precaution with it whatever. But then Harry Clavering had not lived two years in London.

During the hours that the cheque was away from him, Harry had told his father that perhaps, even yet, he might change his purpose as to going to Messrs. Beilby and Burton. He did not know, he said, but he was still in doubt. This had sprung from some chance question which his father had asked, and which had seemed to demand an answer. Mr. Clavering greatly disliked the scheme of life which his son had made. Harry's life hitherto had been prosperous and very creditable. He had gone early to Cambridge, and at twenty-two had become a fellow of his college. This fellowship he could hold for five or six years without going into orders. It would then lead to a living, and would in the meantime afford a livelihood. But, beyond this, Harry, with an energy which he certainly had not inherited from his father, had become a school-master, and was already a rich man. He had done more than well, and there was a great probability that

between them they might be able to buy the next presentation to Clavering, when the time should come in which Sir Hugh should determine on selling it. That Sir Hugh should give the family living to his cousin was never thought probable by any of the family at the rectory; but he might perhaps part with it under such circumstances on favourable terms. For all these reasons the father was very anxious that his son should follow out the course for which he had been intended; but that he, being unenergetic and having hitherto done little for his son, should dictate to a young man who had been energetic, and who had done much for himself, was out of the question. Harry, therefore, was to be the arbiter of his own fate. But when Harry received back the cheque from Julia Brabazon, then he again returned to his resolution respecting Messrs. Beilby and Burton, and took the first opportunity of telling his father that such was the case.

After breakfast he followed his father into his study, and there, sitting in two easy-chairs opposite to each other, they lit each a cigar. Such was the reverend gentleman's custom in the afternoon, and such also in the morning. I do not know whether the smoking of four or five cigars daily by the parson of a parish may now-a-day be considered as a vice in him, but if so, it was the only vice with which Mr. Clavering could be charged. He was a kind, soft-hearted, gracious man, tender to his wife, whom he ever regarded as the angel of his house, indulgent to his daughters, whom he idolized, ever patient with his parishioners, and awake, — though not widely awake, — to the responsibilities of his calling. The world had been too comfortable for him, and also too narrow; so that he had sunk into

idleness. The world had given him much to eat and drink, but it had given him little to do, and thus he had gradually fallen away from his early purposes, till his energy hardly sufficed for the doing of that little. His living gave him eight hundred a year; his wife's fortune nearly doubled that. He had married early, and had got his living early, and had been very prosperous. But he was not a happy man. He knew that he had put off the day of action till the power of action had passed away from him. His library was well furnished, but he rarely read much else than novels and poetry; and of late years the reading even of poetry had given way to the reading of novels. Till within ten years of the hour of which I speak, he had been a hunting parson, — not hunting loudly, but followed his sport as it is followed by moderate sportsmen. Then there had come a new bishop, and the new bishop had sent for him, — nay, finally had come to him, and had lectured him with blatant authority. "My lord," said the parson of Clavering, plucking up something of his past energy, as the colour rose to his face, "I think you are wrong in this. I think you are specially wrong to interfere with me in this way on your first coming among us. You feel it to be your duty, no doubt; but to me it seems that you mistake your duty. But, as the matter is one simply of my own pleasure, I shall give it up." After that Mr. Clavering hunted no more, and never spoke a good word to any one of the bishop of his diocese. For myself, I think it as well that clergymen should not hunt; but had I been the parson of Clavering, I should, under those circumstances, have hunted double.

Mr. Clavering hunted no more, and probably smoked

a greater number of cigars in consequence. He had an increased amount of time at his disposal, but did not, therefore, give more time to his duties. Alas! what time did he give to his duties? He kept a most energetic curate, whom he allowed to do almost what he would with the parish. Every-day services he did prohibit, declaring that he would not have the parish church made ridiculous; but in other respects his curate was the pastor. Once every Sunday he read the service, and once every Sunday he preached, and he resided in his parsonage ten months every year. His wife and daughters went among the poor, — and he smoked cigars in his library. Though not yet fifty, he was becoming fat and idle, — unwilling to walk, and not caring much even for such riding as the bishop had left to him. And to make matters worse, — far worse, he knew all this of himself, and understood it thoroughly. “I see a better path, and know how good it is, but I follow ever the worse.” He was saying that to himself daily, and was saying it always without hope.

And his wife had given him up. She had given him up, not with disdainful rejection, nor with contempt in her eye, or censure in her voice, not with diminution of love or of outward respect. She had given him up as a man abandons his attempts to make his favourite dog take the water. He would fain that the dog he loves should dash into the stream as other dogs will do. It is, to his thinking, a noble instinct in a dog. But his dog dreads the water. As, however, he has learned to love the beast, he puts up with this mischance, and never dreams of banishing poor Ponto from his hearth because of this failure. And so it was with Mrs. Clavering and her husband at the

rectory. He understood it all. He knew that he was so far rejected; and he acknowledged to himself the necessity for such rejection.

"It is a very serious thing to decide upon," he said, when his son had spoken to him.

"Yes; it is serious, — about as serious a thing as a man can think of; but a man cannot put it off on that account. If I mean to make such a change in my plans, the sooner I do it the better."

"But yesterday you were in another mind."

"No, father, not in another mind. I did not tell you then, nor can I tell you all now. I had thought that I should want my money for another purpose for a year or two; but that I have abandoned."

"Is the purpose a secret, Harry?"

"It is a secret, because it concerns another person."

"You were going to lend your money to some one?"

"I must keep it a secret, though you know I seldom have any secrets from you. That idea, however, is abandoned, and I mean to go over to Stratton tomorrow, and tell Mr. Burton that I shall be there after Christmas. I must be at St. Cuthbert's on Tuesday."

Then they both sat silent for a while, silently blowing out their clouds of smoke. The son had said all that he cared to say, and would have wished that there might then be an end of it; but he knew that his father had much on his mind, and would fain express, if he could express it without too much trouble, or without too evident a need of self-reproach, his own thoughts on the subject. "You have made up your mind, then,

altogether that you do not like the church as a profession," he said at last.

"I think I have, father."

"And on what grounds? The grounds which recommend it to you are very strong. Your education has adapted you for it. Your success in it is already ensured by your fellowship. In a great degree you have entered it as a profession already, by taking a fellowship. What you are doing is not choosing a line in life, but changing one already chosen. You are making of yourself a rolling stone."

"A stone should roll till it has come to the spot that suits it."

"Why not give up the school if it irks you?"

"And become a Cambridge Don, and practise deportment among the undergraduates."

"I don't see that you need do that. You need not even live at Cambridge. Take a church in London. You would be sure to get one by holding up your hand. If that, with your fellowship, is not sufficient, I will give you what more you want."

"No, father — no. By God's blessing I will never ask you for a pound. I can hold my fellowship for four years longer without orders, and in four years' time I think I can earn my bread."

"I don't doubt that, Harry."

"Then why should I not follow my wishes in this matter? The truth is, I do not feel myself qualified to be a good clergyman."

"It is not that you have doubts, is it?"

"I might have them if I came to think much about it, — as I must do if I took orders. And I do not wish to be crippled in doing what I think lawful by

conventional rules. A rebellious clergyman is, I think, a sorry object. It seems to me that he is a bird fouling his own nest. Now, I know I should be a rebellious clergyman."

"In our church the life of a clergyman is as the life of any other gentleman, — within very broad limits."

"Then why did Bishop Proudie interfere with your hunting?"

"Limits may be very broad, Harry, and yet exclude hunting. Bishop Proudie was vulgar and intrusive, such being the nature of his wife, who instructs him; but if you were in orders I should be very sorry to see you take to hunting."

"It seems to me that a clergyman has nothing to do in life unless he is always preaching and teaching. Look at Saul," — Mr. Saul was the curate of Clavering — "he is always preaching and teaching. He is doing the best he can; and what a life of it he has! He has literally thrown off all worldly cares, — and consequently everybody laughs at him, and nobody loves him. I don't believe a better man breathes, but I shouldn't like his life."

At this point there was another pause, which lasted till the cigars had come to an end. Then, as he threw the stump into the fire, Mr. Clavering spoke again. "The truth is, Harry, that you have had, all your life, a bad example before you."

"No, father."

"Yes, my son; — let me speak on to the end, and then you can say what you please. In me you have had a bad example on one side, and now, in poor Saul, you have a bad example on the other side. Can

you fancy no life between the two, which would fit your physical nature, which is larger than his, and your mental wants, which are higher than mine? Yes, they are, Harry. It is my duty to say this, but it would be unseemly that there should be any controversy between us on the subject."

"If you choose to stop me in that way —"

"I do choose to stop you in that way. As for Saul, it is impossible that you should become such a man as he. It is not that he mortifies his flesh, but that he has no flesh to mortify. He is unconscious of the flavour of venison, or the scent of roses, or the beauty of women. He is an exceptional specimen of a man, and you need no more fear, than you should venture to hope, that you could become such as he is."

At this point they were interrupted by the entrance of Fanny Clavering, who came to say that Mr. Saul was in the drawing-room. "What does he want, Fanny?" This question Mr. Clavering asked half in a whisper, but with something of comic humour in his face, as though partly afraid that Mr. Saul should hear it, and partly intending to convey a wish that he might escape Mr. Saul, if it were possible.

"It's about the iron church, papa. He says it is come, — or part of it has come, — and he wants you to go out to Cumberly Green about the site."

"I thought that was all settled."

"He says not."

"What does it matter where it is? He can put it anywhere he likes on the Green. However, I had better go to him." So Mr. Clavering went. Cumberly Green was a hamlet in the parish of Clavering, three miles distant from the church, the people of which had

got into a wicked habit of going to a dissenting chapel near to them. By Mr. Saul's energy, but chiefly out of Mr. Clavering's purse, an iron chapel had been purchased for a hundred and fifty pounds, and Mr. Saul proposed to add to his own duties the pleasing occupation of walking to Cumberly Green every Sunday morning before breakfast, and every Wednesday evening after dinner, to perform a service and bring back to the true flock as many of the erring sheep of Cumberly Green as he might be able to catch. Towards the purchase of this iron church Mr. Clavering had at first given a hundred pounds. Sir Hugh, in answer to the fifth application, had very ungraciously, through his steward, bestowed ten pounds. Among the farmers one pound nine and eightpence had been collected. Mr. Saul had given two pounds; Mrs. Clavering gave five pounds; the girls gave ten shillings each; Henry Clavering gave five pounds; — and then the parson made up the remainder. But Mr. Saul had journeyed thrice painfully to Bristol, making the bargain for the church, going and coming each time by third-class, and he had written all the letters; but Mrs. Clavering had paid the postage, and she and the girls between them were making the covering for the little altar.

"Is it all settled, Harry?" said Fanny, stopping with her brother, and hanging over his chair. She was a pretty, gay-spirited girl, with bright eyes and dark brown hair, which fell in two curls behind her ears.

"He has said nothing to unsettle it."

"I know it makes him very unhappy."

"No, Fanny, not very unhappy. He would rather that I should go into the church, but that is about all."

"I think you are quite right."

"And Mary thinks I am quite wrong."

"Mary thinks so, of course. So should I too, perhaps, if I were engaged to a clergyman. That's the old story of the fox who had lost his tail."

"And your tail isn't gone yet?"

"No, my tail isn't gone yet. Mary thinks that no life is like a clergyman's life. But, Harry, though mamma hasn't said so, I'm sure she thinks you are right. She won't say so as long as it may seem to interfere with anything papa may choose to say; but I'm sure she's glad in her heart."

"And I am glad in my heart, Fanny. And as I'm the person most concerned, I suppose that's the most material thing." Then they followed their father into the drawing-room.

"Couldn't you drive Mrs. Clavering over in the pony chair, and settle it between you," said Mr. Clavering to his curate. Mr. Saul looked disappointed. In the first place, he hated driving the pony, which was a rapid-footed little beast, that had a will of his own; and in the next place, he thought the rector ought to visit the spot on such an occasion. "Or Mrs. Clavering will drive you," said the rector, remembering Mr. Saul's objection to the pony. Still Mr. Saul looked unhappy. Mr. Saul was very tall and very thin, with a tall thin head, and weak eyes, and a sharp, well-cut nose, and, so to say, no lips, and very white teeth, with no beard, and a well-cut chin. His face was so thin that his cheekbones obtruded themselves unpleasantly. He wore a long rusty black coat, and a high rusty black waist-coat, and trousers that were brown with dirty roads and general ill-usage. Never-

less, it never occurred to any one that Mr. Saul did not look like a gentleman, not even to himself, to whom no ideas whatever on that subject ever presented themselves. But that he was a gentleman I think he knew well enough, and was able to carry himself before Sir Hugh and his wife with quite as much ease as he could do in the rectory. Once or twice he had dined at the great house; but Lady Clavering had declared him to be a bore, and Sir Hugh had called him "that most offensive of all animals, a clerical prig." It had therefore been decided that he was not to be asked to the great house any more. It may be as well to state here, as elsewhere, that Mr. Clavering very rarely went to his nephew's table. On certain occasions he did do so, so that there might be no recognized quarrel between him and Sir Hugh; but such visits were few and far between.

After a few more words from Mr. Saul, and a glance from his wife's eye, Mr. Clavering consented to go to Cumberly Green, though there was nothing he liked so little as a morning spent with his curate. When he had started, Harry told his mother also of his final decision. "I shall go to Stratton to-morrow and settle it all."

"And what does papa say?" asked the mother.

"Just what he has said before. It is not so much that he wishes me to be a clergyman, as that he does not wish me to have lost all my time up to this."

"It is more than that, I think, Harry," said his elder sister, a tall girl, less pretty than her sister, apparently less careful of her prettiness, very quiet, or, as some said, demure, but known to be good as gold by all who knew her well.

"I doubt it," said Harry stoutly. "But, however that may be, a man must choose for himself."

"We all thought you had chosen," said Mary.

"If it is settled," said the mother, "I suppose we shall do no good by opposing it."

"Would you wish to oppose it, mamma?" said Harry.

"No, my dear. I think you should judge for yourself."

"You see I could have no scope in the church for that sort of ambition which would satisfy me. Look at such men as Locke, and Stephenson, and Brassey. They are the men who seem to me to do most in the world. They were all self-educated, but surely a man can't have a worse chance because he has learned something. Look at old Beilby, with a seat in Parliament, and a property worth two or three hundred thousand pounds! When he was my age he had nothing but his weekly wages."

"I don't know whether Mr. Beilby is a very happy man or a very good man," said Mary.

"I don't know either," said Harry; "but I do know that he has thrown a single arch over a wider span of water than ever was done before, and that ought to make him happy." After saying this in a tone of high authority, befitting his dignity as a fellow of his college, Harry Clavering went out, leaving his mother and sisters to discuss the subject, which to two of them was all-important. As to Mary, she had hopes of her own, vested in the clerical concerns of a neighbouring parish.

CHAPTER III.

Lord Ongar.

ON the next morning Harry Clavering rode over to Stratton, thinking much of his misery as he went. It was all very well for him, in the presence of his own family to talk of his profession as the one subject which was to him of any importance; but he knew very well himself that he was only beguiling them in doing so. This question of a profession was, after all, but dead leaves to him, — to him who had a canker at his heart, a perpetual thorn in his bosom, a misery within him which no profession could mitigate! Those dear ones at home guessed nothing of this, and he would take care that they should guess nothing. Why should they have the pain of knowing that he had been made wretched for ever by blighted hopes? His mother, indeed, had suspected something in those sweet days of his roaming with Julia through the park. She had once or twice said a word to warn him. But of the very truth of his deep love, — so he told himself, — she had been happily ignorant. Let her be ignorant. Why should he make his mother unhappy? As these thoughts passed through his mind, I think that he revelled in his wretchedness, and made much to himself of his misery. He sucked in his sorrow greedily, and was somewhat proud to have had occasion to break his heart. But not the less, because he was thus early blighted, would he struggle for success in the world. He would show her that, as his wife, she might have had a worthier position than Lord Ongar could give her. He, too, might probably rise the quicker in the world, as now he would have no

impediment of wife or family. Then, as he rode along, he composed a sonnet, fitting to his case, the strength and rhythm of which seemed to him, as he sat on horseback, to be almost perfect. Unfortunately, when he was back at Clavering, and sat in his room with the pen in his hand, the turn of the words had escaped him.

He found Mr. Burton at home, and was not long in concluding his business. Messrs. Beilby and Burton were not only civil engineers, but were land surveyors also, and land valuers on a great scale. They were employed much by Government upon public buildings, and if not architects themselves, were supposed to know all that architects should do and should not do. In the purchase of great properties Mr. Burton's opinion was supposed to be, or to have been, as good as any in the kingdom, and therefore there was very much to be learned in the office at Stratton. But Mr. Burton was not a rich man like his partner, Mr. Beilby, nor an ambitious man. He had never soared Parliamentwards, had never speculated, had never invented, and never been great. He had been the father of a very large family, all of whom were doing as well in the world, and some of them perhaps better, than their father. Indeed, there were many who said that Mr. Burton would have been a richer man if he had not joined himself in partnership with Mr. Beilby. Mr. Beilby had the reputation of swallowing more than his share wherever he went.

When the business part of the arrangement was finished, Mr. Burton talked to his future pupil about lodgings, and went out with him into the town to look for rooms. The old man found that Harry Clavering

was rather nice in this respect, and in his own mind formed an idea that this new beginner might have been a more auspicious pupil, had he not already become a fellow of a college. Indeed, Harry talked to him quite as though they two were on an equality together; and, before they had parted, Mr. Burton was not sure that Harry did not patronize him. He asked the young man, however, to join them at their early dinner, and then introduced him to Mrs. Burton, and to their youngest daughter, the only child who was still living with them. "All my other girls are married, Mr. Clavering; and all of them married to men connected with my own profession." The colour came slightly into Florence Burton's cheeks as she heard her father's words, and Harry asked himself whether the old man expected that he should go through the same ordeal; but Mr. Burton himself was quite unaware that he had said anything wrong, and then went on to speak of the successes of his sons. "But they began early, Mr. Clavering; and worked hard, — very hard indeed." He was a good, kindly, garrulous old man; but Harry began to doubt whether he would learn much at Stratton. It was, however, too late to think of that now, and everything was fixed.

Harry, when he looked at Florence Burton, at once declared to himself that she was plain. Anything more unlike Julia Brabazon never appeared in the guise of a young lady. Julia was tall, with a high brow, a glorious complexion, a nose as finely modelled as though a Grecian sculptor had cut it, a small mouth, but lovely in its curves, and a chin that finished and made perfect the symmetry of her face. Her neck was long, but graceful as a swan's, her bust was full,

and her whole figure like that of a goddess. Added to this, when he had first known her, had been all the charm of youth. When she had returned to Clavering the other day, the affianced bride of Lord Ongar, he had hardly known whether to admire or to deplore the settled air of established womanhood which she had assumed. Her large eyes had always lacked something of rapid glancing sparkling brightness. They had been glorious eyes to him, and in those early days he had not known that they lacked aught; but he had perceived, or perhaps fancied, that now, in her present condition they were often cold, and sometimes almost cruel. Nevertheless he was ready to swear that she was perfect in her beauty.

Poor Florence Burton was short of stature, was brown, meagre, and poor-looking. So said Harry Clavering to himself. Her small hand, though soft, lacked that wondrous charm of touch which Julia's possessed. Her face was short, and her forehead, though it was broad and open, had none of that feminine command which Julia's look conveyed. That Florence's eyes were very bright, — bright and soft as well, he allowed; and her dark brown hair was very glossy; but she was, on the whole, a mean-looking little thing. He could not, as he said to himself on his return home, avoid the comparison, as she was the first girl he had seen since he had parted from Julia Brabazon.

"I hope you'll find yourself comfortable at Stratton, sir?" said old Mrs. Burton.

"Thank you," said Harry, "but I want very little myself in that way. Anything does for me."

"One young gentleman we had took a bedroom

at Mrs. Pott's, and did very nicely without any second room at all. Don't you remember Mr. B.; it was young Granger."

"Young Granger had a very short allowance," said Mr. Burton. "He lived upon fifty pounds a year all the time he was here."

"And I don't think Scarness had more when he began," said Mrs. Burton. "Mr. Scarness married one of my girls, Mr. Clavering, when he started himself at Liverpool. He has pretty nigh all the Liverpool docks under him now. I have heard him say that butcher's meat did not cost him four shillings a week all the time he was here. I've always thought Stratton one of the reasonablest places anywhere for a young man to do for himself in."

"I don't know, my dear," said the husband, "that Mr. Clavering will care very much for that."

"Perhaps not, Mr. B.; but I do like to see young men careful about their spendings. What's the use of spending a shilling when sixpence will do as well? And sixpence saved when a man has nothing but himself, becomes pounds and pounds by the time he has a family about him."

During all this time Miss Burton said little or nothing, and Harry Clavering himself did not say much. He could not express any intention of rivalling Mr. Scarness's economy in the article of butcher's meat, nor could he promise to content himself with Granger's solitary bedroom. But as he rode home he almost began to fear that he had made a mistake. He was not wedded to the joys of his college hall, or the college common room. He did not like the narrowness of

college life. But he doubted whether the change from that to the oft-repeated hospitalities of Mrs. Burton might not be too much for him. Scarness's four shillings'-worth of butcher's meat had already made him half sick of his new profession, and though Stratton might be the "reasonablest place anywhere for a young man," he could not look forward to living there for a year with much delight. As for Miss Burton, it might be quite as well that she was plain, as he wished for none of the delights which beauty affords to young men.

On his return home, however, he made no complaint of Stratton. He was too strong-willed to own that he had been in any way wrong, and when early in the following week he started for St. Cuthbert's, he was able to speak with cheerful hope of his new prospects. If ultimately he should find life in Stratton to be unendurable, he would cut that part of his career short, and contrive to get up to London at an earlier time than he had intended.

On the 31st of August Lord Ongar and Sir Hugh Clavering reached Clavering Park, and, as has been already told, a pretty little note was at once sent up to Miss Brabazon in her bedroom. When she met Lord Ongar in the drawing-room, about an hour afterwards, she had instructed herself that it would be best to say nothing of the note; but she could not refrain from a word. "I am much obliged, my lord, by your kindness and generosity," she said, as she gave him her hand. He merely bowed and smiled, and muttered something as to his hoping that he might always find it as easy to gratify her. He was a little man, on whose behalf it certainly appeared that the Peerage must have told a falsehood; it seemed so at least to

those who judged of his years from his appearance. The Peerage said that he was thirty-six, and that, no doubt, was in truth his age, but any one would have declared him to be ten years older. This look was produced chiefly by the effect of an elaborately dressed jet black wig which he wore. What misfortune had made him bald so early, — if to be bald early in life be a misfortune, — I cannot say; but he had lost the hair from the crown of his head, and had preferred wiggery to baldness. No doubt an effort was made to hide the wiggishness of his wigs, but what effect in that direction was ever made successfully? He was, moreover, weak, thin, and physically poor, and had, no doubt, increased this weakness and poorness by hard living. Though others thought him old, time had gone swiftly with him, and he still thought himself a young man. He hunted, though he could not ride. He shot, though he could not walk. And, unfortunately, he drank, though he had no capacity for drinking! His friends at last had taught him to believe that his only chance of saving himself lay in marriage, and therefore he had engaged himself to Julia Brabazon, purchasing her at the price of a brilliant settlement. If Lord Ongar should die before her, Ongar Park was to be hers for life, with thousands a year to maintain it. Courton Castle, the great family seat, would of course go to the heir; but Ongar Park was supposed to be the most delightful small country-seat anywhere within thirty miles of London. It lay among the Surrey hills, and all the world had heard of the charms of Ongar Park. If Julia were to survive her lord, Ongar Park was to be hers; and they who saw them both together had but little doubt that she would come to the

enjoyment of this clause in her settlement. Lady Clavering had been clever in arranging the match; and Sir Hugh, though he might have been unwilling to give his sister-in-law money out of his own pocket, had performed his duty as a brother-in-law in looking to her future welfare. Julia Brabazon had no doubt that she was doing well. Poor Harry Clavering! She had loved him in the days of her romance. She, too, had written her sonnets. But she had grown old earlier in life than he had done, and had taught herself that romance could not be allowed to a woman in her position. She was highly born, the daughter of a peer, without money, and even without a home to which she had any claim. Of course she had accepted Lord Ongar, but she had not put out her hand to take all these good things without resolving that she would do her duty to her future lord. The duty would be doubtless disagreeable, but she would do it with all the more diligence on that account.

September passed by, hecatombs of partridges were slaughtered, and the day of the wedding drew nigh. It was pretty to see Lord Ongar and the self-satisfaction which he enjoyed at this time. The world was becoming young with him again, and he thought that he rather liked the respectability of his present mode of life. He gave himself but scanty allowances of wine, and no allowance of anything stronger than wine, and did not dislike his temperance. There was about him at all hours an air which seemed to say, "There; I told you all that I could do it as soon as there was any necessity." And in these halcyon days he could shoot for an hour without his pony, and he liked the gentle courteous badinage which was bestowed

upon his courtship, and he liked also Julia's beauty. Her conduct to him was perfect. She was never pert, never exigent, never romantic, and never humble. She never bored him, and yet was always ready to be with him when he wished it. She was never exalted; and yet she bore her high place as became a woman nobly born and acknowledged to be beautiful.

"I declare you have quite made a lover of him," said Lady Clavering to her sister. When a thought of the match had first arisen in Sir Hugh's London house, Lady Clavering had been eager in praise of Lord Ongar, or eager in praise rather of the position which the future Lady Ongar might hold; but since the prize had been secured, since it had become plain that Julia was to be the greater woman of the two, she had harped sometimes on the other string. As a sister she had striven for a sister's welfare, but as a woman she could not keep herself from comparisons which might tend to show that after all, well as Julia was doing, she was not doing better than her elder sister had done. Hermione had married simply a baronet, and not the richest or the most amiable among baronets; but she had married a man suitable in age and wealth, with whom any girl might have been in love. She had not sold herself to be the nurse, or not to be the nurse, as it might turn out, of a worn-out debauché. She would have hinted nothing of this, perhaps have thought nothing of this, had not Julia and Lord Ongar walked together through the Clavering groves as though they were two young people. She owed it as a duty to her sister to point out that Lord Ongar could not be a romantic young person, and ought not to be encouraged to play that part.

"I don't know that I have made anything of him," answered Julia. "I suppose he's much like other men when they're going to be married." Julia quite understood the ideas that were passing through her sister's mind, and did not feel them to be unnatural.

"What I mean is, that he has come out so strong in the Romeo line, which we hardly expected, you know. We shall have him under your bedroom window with a guitar, like Don Giovanni."

"I hope not, because it's so cold. I don't think it likely, as he seems fond of going to bed early."

"And it's the best thing for him," said Lady Clavering, becoming serious and carefully benevolent. "It's quite a wonder what good hours and quiet living have done for him in so short a time. I was observing him as he walked yesterday, and he put his feet to the ground as firmly almost as Hugh does."

"Did he indeed? I hope he won't have the habit of putting his hand down firmly as Hugh does sometimes."

"As for that," said Lady Clavering, with a little tremor, "I don't think there's much difference between them. They all say that when Lord Ongar means a thing he does mean it."

"I think a man ought to have a way of his own."

"And a woman also, don't you, my dear? But, as I was saying, if Lord Ongar will continue to take care of himself he may become quite a different man. Hugh says that he drinks next to nothing now, and though he sometimes lights a cigar in the smoking-room at night, he hardly ever smokes it. You must do what you can to keep him from tobacco. I happen to know

that Sir Charles Poddy said that so many cigars were worse for him even than brandy."

All this Julia bore with an even temper. She was determined to bear everything till her time should come. Indeed she had made herself understand that the hearing of such things as these was a part of the price which she was to be called upon to pay. It was not pleasant for her to hear what Sir Charles Poddy had said about the tobacco and brandy of the man she was just going to marry. She would sooner have heard of his riding sixty miles a day, or dancing all night, as she might have heard had she been contented to take Harry Clavering. But she had made her selection with her eyes open, and was not disposed to quarrel with her bargain because that which she had bought was no better than the article which she had known it to be when she was making her purchase. Nor was she even angry with her sister. "I will do the best I can, Hermy; you may be sure of that. But there are some things which it is useless to talk about."

"But it was as well you should know what Sir Charles said."

"I know quite enough of what he says, Hermy, — quite as much, I daresay, as you do. But, never mind. If Lord Ongar has given up smoking, I quite agree with you that it's a good thing. I wish they'd all give it up, for I hate the smell of it. Hugh has got worse and worse. He never cares about changing his clothes now."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Sir Hugh to his wife that night; "sixty thousand a year is a very fine income, but Julia will find she has caught a Tartar."

"I suppose he'll hardly live long; will he?"

"I don't know or care when he lives or when he dies; but, by heaven, he is the most overbearing fellow I ever had in the house with me. I wouldn't stand him here for another fortnight, — not even to make her all safe."

"It will soon be over. They'll be gone on Thursday."

"What do you think of his having the impudence to tell Cunliffe," — Cunliffe was the head keeper; — "before my face, that he didn't know anything about pheasants! 'Well, my lord, I think we've got a few about the place,' said Cunliffe. 'Very few,' said Ongar, with a sneer. Now, if I haven't a better head of game here than he has at Courton, I'll eat him. But the impudence of his saying that before me!"

"Did you make him any answer?"

"'There's about enough to suit me,' I said. Then he skulked away, knocked off his pins. I shouldn't like to be his wife; I can tell Julia that."

"Julia is very clever," said the sister.

The day of the marriage came, and everything at Clavering was done with much splendour. Four bridesmaids came down from London on the preceding day; two were already staying in the house, and the two cousins came as two more from the rectory. Julia Brabazon had never been really intimate with Mary and Fanny Clavering, but she had known them well enough to make it odd if she did not ask them to come to her wedding and to take a part in the ceremony. And, moreover, she had thought of Harry and her little romance of other days. Harry, perhaps,

might be glad to know that she had shown this courtesy to his sisters. Harry, she knew, would be away at his school. Though she had asked him whether he meant to come to her wedding, she had been better pleased that he should be absent. She had not many regrets herself, but it pleased her to think that he should have them. So Mary and Fanny Clavering were asked to attend her at the altar. Mary and Fanny would both have preferred to decline, but their mother had told them that they could not do so. "It would make ill-feeling," said Mrs. Clavering; "and that is what your papa particularly wishes to avoid."

"When you say papa particularly wishes anything, mamma, you always mean that you wish it particularly yourself," said Fanny. "But if it must be done, it must; and then I shall know how to behave when Mary's time comes."

The bells were rung lustily all the morning, and all the parish was there, round about the church, to see. There was no record of a lord ever having been married in Clavering church before; and now this lord was going to marry my lady's sister. It was all one as though she were a Clavering herself. But there was no ecstatic joy in the parish. There were to be no bonfires, and no eating and drinking at Sir Hugh's expense, — no comforts provided for any of the poor by Lady Clavering on that special occasion. Indeed, there was never much of such kindnesses between the lord of the soil and his dependants. A certain stipulated dole was given at Christmas for coals and blankets; but even for that there was generally some wrangle between the rector and the steward. "If there's to be all this row about it," the rector had said to the

steward, "I'll never ask for it again." "I wish my uncle would only be as good as his word," Sir Hugh had said, when the rector's speech was repeated to him. Therefore, there was not much of real rejoicing in the parish on this occasion, though the bells were rung loudly, and though the people, young and old, did cluster round the churchyard to see the lord lead his bride out of the church. "A pair feckless thing, tottering along like, — not half the makings of a man. A stout lass like she could a'most blow him away wi' a puff of her mouth." That was the verdict which an old farmer's wife passed upon him, and that verdict was made good by the general opinion of the parish.

But though the lord might be only half a man, Julia Brabazon walked out from the church every inch a countess. Whatever price she might have paid, she had at any rate got the thing which she had intended to buy. And as she stepped into the chariot which carried her away to the railway station on her way to Dover, she told herself that she had done right. She had chosen her profession, as Harry Clavering had chosen his; and having so far succeeded, she would do her best to make her success perfect. Mercenary! Of course she had been mercenary. Were not all men and women mercenary upon whom devolved the necessity of earning their bread?

Then there was a great breakfast at the park, — for the quality, — and the rector on this occasion submitted himself to become the guest of the nephew whom he thoroughly disliked.

CHAPTER IV.

Florence Burton.

It was now Christmas time at Stratton, or rather Christmas time was near at hand; not the Christmas next after the autumn of Lord Ongar's marriage, but the following Christmas, and Harry Clavering had finished his studies in Mr. Burton's office. He flattered himself that he had not been idle while he was there, and was now about to commence his more advanced stage of pupilage, under the great Mr. Beilby in London, with hopes which were still good, if they were not so magnificent as they once had been. When he first saw Mr. Burton in his office, and beheld the dusty pigeon-holes with dusty papers, and caught the first glimpse of things as they really were in the workshop of that man of business, he had, to say the truth, been disgusted. And Mrs. Burton's early dinner, and Florence Burton's "plain face" and plain ways, had disconcerted him. On that day he had repented of his intention with regard to Stratton; but he had carried out his purpose like a man, and now he rejoiced greatly that he had done so. He rejoiced greatly, though his hopes were somewhat sobered, and his views of life less grand than they had been. He was to start for Clavering early on the following morning, intending to spend his Christmas at home, and we will see him and listen to him as he bade farewell to one of the members of Mr. Burton's family.

He was sitting in a small back parlour in Mr. Burton's house, and on the table of the room there was burning a single candle. It was a dull, dingy, brown room, furnished with horsehair-covered chairs,

an old horsehair sofa, and heavy rusty curtains. I don't know that there was in the room any attempt at ornament, as certainly there was no evidence of wealth. It was now about seven o'clock in the evening, and tea was over in Mrs. Burton's establishment. Harry Clavering had had his tea, and had eaten his hot muffin, at the further side from the fire of the family table, while Florence had poured out the tea, and Mrs. Burton had sat by the fire on one side with a handkerchief over her lap, and Mr. Burton had been comfortable with his arm-chair and his slippers on the other side. When tea was over, Harry had made his parting speech to Mrs. Burton, and that lady had kissed him, and bade God bless him. "I'll see you for a moment before you go, in my office, Harry," Mr. Burton had said. Then Harry had gone downstairs, and some one else had gone boldly with him, and they two were sitting together in the dingy brown room. After that I need hardly tell my reader what had become of Harry Clavering's perpetual life-enduring heart's misery.

He and Florence were sitting on the old horsehair sofa, and Florence's hand was in his. "My darling," he said, "how am I to live for the next two years?"

"You mean five years, Harry."

"No; I mean two, — that is two, unless I can make the time less. I believe you'd be better pleased to think it was ten."

"Much better pleased to think it was ten than to have no such hope at all. Of course we shall see each other. It's not as though you were going to New Zealand."

"I almost wish I were. One would agree then as to the necessity of this cursed delay."

"Harry, Harry!"

"It is accursed. The prudence of the world in these latter days seems to me to be more abominable than all its other iniquities."

"But, Harry, we should have no income."

"Income is a word that I hate."

"Now you are getting on to your high horse, and you know I always go out of the way when you begin to prance on that beast. As for me, I don't want to leave papa's house where I am sure of my bread and butter, till I'm sure of it in another."

"You say that, Florence, on purpose to torment me."

"Dear Harry, do you think I want to torment you on your last night? The truth is, I love you so well that I can afford to be patient for you."

"I hate patience, and always did. Patience is one of the worst vices I know. It's almost as bad as humility. You'll tell me you're 'umble next. If you'll only add that you're contented, you'll describe yourself as one of the lowest of God's creatures."

"I don't know about being 'umble, but I am contented. Are not you contented with me, sir?"

"No,—because you're not in a hurry to be married."

"What a goose you are. Do you know I'm not sure that if you really love a person, and are quite confident about him,—as I am of you,—that having to look forward to being married is not the best part of it all. I suppose you'll like to get my letters now, but I don't know that you'll care for them much when we've been man and wife for ten years."

"But one can't live upon letters."

"I shall expect you to live upon mine, and to grow fat on them. There; — I heard papa's step on the stairs. He said you were to go to him. Good-by, Harry; dearest Harry! What a blessed wind it was that blew you here."

"Stop a moment; — about your getting to Claver-
ing. I shall come for you on Easter-eve."

"Oh, no; — why should you have so much trouble and expense?"

"I tell you I shall come for you, — unless, indeed, you decline to travel with me."

"It will be so nice! And then I shall be sure to have you with me the first moment I see them. I shall think it very awful when I first meet your father."

"He's the most good-natured man, I should say, in England."

"But he'll think me so plain. You did at first, you know. But he won't be uncivil enough to tell me so, as you did. And Mary is to be married in Easter week? Oh, dear, oh, dear; I shall be so shy among them all."

"You shy! I never saw you shy in my life. I don't suppose you were ever really put out yet."

"But I must really put you out, because papa is waiting for you. Dear, dear, dearest Harry. Though I am so patient, I shall count the hours till you come for me. Dearest Harry!" Then she bore with him, as he pressed her close to his bosom, and kissed her lips, and her forehead, and her glossy hair. When he was gone she sat down alone for a few minutes on the old sofa, and hugged herself in her happiness. What

a happy wind that had been which had blown such a lover as that for her to Stratton!

"I think he's a good young man," said Mrs. Burton, as soon as she was left with her old husband upstairs.

"Yes, he's a good young man. He means very well."

"But he is not idle; is he?"

"No — no; he's not idle. And he's very clever; — too clever, I'm afraid. But I think he'll do well, though it may take him some time to settle."

"It seems so natural his taking to Flo; doesn't it? They've all taken one when they went away, and they've all done very well. Deary me; how sad the house will be when Flo has gone."

"Yes, — it'll make a difference that way. But what then? I wouldn't wish to keep one of 'em at home for that reason."

"No, indeed. I think I'd feel ashamed of myself to have a daughter not married, or not in the way to be married afore she's thirty. I couldn't bear to think that no young man should take a fancy to a girl of mine. But Flo's not twenty yet, and Carry, who was the oldest to go, wasn't four-and-twenty when Scarness took her." Thereupon the old lady put her handkerchief to the corner of her eyes, and wept gently.

"Flo isn't gone yet," said Mr. Burton.

"But I hope, B., it's not to be a long engagement. I don't like long engagements. It ain't good, — not for the girl; it ain't, indeed."

"We were engaged for seven years."

"People weren't so much in a hurry then at anything; but I ain't sure it was very good for me. And

though we weren't just married, we were living next door and saw each other. What'll come to Flo if she's to be here and he's to be up in London, pleasuring himself?"

"Flo must bear it as other girls do," said the father, as he got up from his chair.

"I think he's a good young man; I think he is," said the mother. "But don't stand out for too much for 'em to begin upon. What matters? Sure if they were to be a little short you could help 'em." To such a suggestion as this Mr. Burton thought it as well to make no answer, but with ponderous steps descended to his office.

"Well, Harry," said Mr. Burton, "so you're to be off in the morning?"

"Yes, sir; I shall breakfast at home to-morrow."

"Ah, — when I was your age I always used to make an early start. Three hours before breakfast never does any hurt. But it shouldn't be more than that. The wind gets into the stomach." Harry had no remark to make on this, and waited, therefore, till Mr. Burton went on. "And you'll be up in London by the 10th of next month?"

"Yes, sir; I intend to be at Mr. Beilby's office on the 11th."

"That's right. Never lose a day. In losing a day now, you don't lose what you might earn now in a day, but what you might be earning when you're at your best. A young man should always remember that. You can't dispense with a round in the ladder going up. You only make your time at the top so much the shorter."

"I hope you'll find that I'm all right, sir. I don't mean to be idle."

"Pray don't. Of course, you know, I speak to you very differently from what I should do if you were simply going away from my office. What I shall have to give Florence will be very little, that is, comparatively little. She shall have a hundred a year, when she marries, till I die; and after my death and her mother's she will share with the others. But a hundred a year will be nothing to you."

"Won't it, sir? I think a very great deal of a hundred a year. I'm to have a hundred and fifty from the office; and I should be ready to marry on that to-morrow."

"You couldn't live on such an income, — unless you were to alter your habits very much."

"But I will alter them."

"We shall see. You are so placed that by marrying you would lose a considerable income; and I would advise you to put off thinking of it for the next two years."

"My belief is, that settling down would be the best thing in the world to make me work."

"We'll try what a year will do. So Florence is to go to your father's house at Easter?"

"Yes, sir: she has been good enough to promise to come, if you have no objection."

"It is quite as well that they should know her early. I only hope they will like her as well as we like you. Now I'll say good-night, — and good-by." Then Harry went, and walking up and down the High Street of Stratton, thought of all that he had done during the past year.

On his arrival at Stratton that idea of perpetual misery arising from blighted affection was still strong within his breast. He had given all his heart to a false woman who had betrayed him. He had risked all his fortune on one cast of the die, and, gambler-like, had lost everything. On the day of Julia's marriage he had shut himself up at the school, — luckily it was a holiday, — and had flattered himself that he had gone through some hours of intense agony. No doubt he did suffer somewhat, for in truth he had loved the woman; but such sufferings are seldom perpetual, and with him they had been as easy of cure as with most others. A little more than a year had passed, and now he was already engaged to another woman. As he thought of this he did not by any means accuse himself of inconstancy or of weakness of heart. It appeared to him now the most natural thing in the world that he should love Florence Burton. In those old days he had never seen Florence, and had hardly thought seriously of what qualities a man really wants in a wife. As he walked up and down the hill of Stratton Street with the kiss of the dear, modest, affectionate girl still warm upon his lips, he told himself that a marriage with such a one as Julia Brabazon would have been altogether fatal to his chance of happiness.

And things had occurred and rumours had reached him which assisted him much in adopting this view of the subject. It was known to all the Claverings, — and even to all others who cared about such things, — that Lord and Lady Ongar were not happy together, and it had been already said that Lady Ongar had misconducted herself. There was a certain count

whose name had come to be mingled with hers in a way that was, to say the least of it, very unfortunate. Sir Hugh Clavering had declared, in Mrs. Clavering's hearing, though but little disposed in general to make many revelations to any of the family at the rectory, "that he did not intend to take his sister-in-law's part. She had made her own bed, and she must lie upon it. She had known what Lord Ongar was before she had married him, and the fault was her own." So much Sir Hugh had said, and, in saying it, had done all that in him lay to damn his sister-in-law's fair fame. Harry Clavering, little as he had lived in the world during the last twelve months, still knew that some people told a different story. The earl too and his wife had not been in England since their marriage; — so that these rumours had been filtered to them at home through a foreign medium. During most of their time they had been in Italy, and now, as Harry knew, they were at Florence. He had heard that Lord Ongar had declared his intention of suing for a divorce; but that he supposed to be erroneous, as the two were still living under the same roof. Then he heard that Lord Ongar was ill; and whispers were spread abroad darkly and doubtingly, as though great misfortunes were apprehended.

Harry could not fail to tell himself that had Julia become his wife, as she had once promised, these whispers and this darkness would hardly have come to pass. But not on that account did he now regret that her early vows had not been kept. Living at Stratton, he had taught himself to think much of the quiet domesticities of life, and to believe that Florence Burton was fitter to be his wife than Julia Brabazon.

He told himself that he had done well to find this out, and that he had been wise to act upon it. His wisdom had in truth consisted in his capacity to feel that Florence was a nice girl, clever, well-minded, high-principled, and full of spirit, — and in falling in love with her as a consequence. All his regard for the quiet domesticities had come from his love, and had had no share in producing it. Florence was bright-eyed. No eyes were ever brighter, either in tears or in laughter. And when he came to look at her well he found that he had been an idiot to think her plain. "There are things that grow to beauty as you look at them, — to exquisite beauty; and you are one of them," he had said to her. "And there are men," she had answered, "who grow to flattery as you listen to them, — to impudent flattery; and you are one of them." "I thought you plain the first day I saw you. That's not flattery." "Yes, sir, it is; and you mean it for flattery. But after all, Harry, it comes only to this, that you want to tell me that you have learned to love me." He repeated all this to himself as he walked up and down Stratton, and declared to himself that she was very lovely. It had been given to him to ascertain this, and he was rather proud of himself. But he was a little diffident about his father. He thought that, perhaps, his father might see Florence as he himself had first seen her, and might not have discernment enough to ascertain his mistake as he had done. But Florence was not going to Clavering at once, and he would be able to give beforehand his own account of her. He had not been home since his engagement had been a thing settled; but his position with regard to Florence had been declared by letter,

and his mother had written to the young lady asking her to come to Clavering.

When Harry got home all the family received him with congratulations. "I am so glad to think that you should marry early," his mother said to him in a whisper. "But I am not married yet, mother," he answered.

"Do show me a lock of her hair," said Fanny, laughing. "It's twice prettier hair than yours, though she doesn't think half so much about it as you do," said her brother, pinching Fanny's arm. "But you'll show me a lock, won't you?" said Fanny.

"I'm so glad she's to be here at my marriage," said Mary, "because then Edward will know her. I'm so glad that he will see her." "Edward will have other fish to fry, and won't care much about her," said Harry.

"It seems you're going to do the regular thing," said his father, "like all the good apprentices. Marry your master's daughter, and then become Lord Mayor of London." This was not the view in which it had pleased Harry to regard his engagement. All the other "young men" that had gone to Mr. Burton's had married Mr. Burton's daughters, — or, at least, enough had done so to justify the Stratton assertion that all had fallen into the same trap. The Burtons, with their five girls, were supposed in Stratton to have managed their affairs very well, and something of these hints had reached Harry's ears. He would have preferred that the thing should not have been made so common, but he was not fool enough to make himself really unhappy on that head. "I don't know much about becoming Lord Mayor," he replied. "That pro-

motion doesn't lie exactly in our line." "But marrying your master's daughter does, it seems," said the Rector. Harry thought that this as coming from his father was almost ill-natured, and therefore dropped the conversation.

"I'm sure we shall like her," said Fanny.

"I think that I shall like Harry's choice," said Mrs. Clavering.

"I do hope Edward will like her," said Mary.

"Mary," said her sister, "I do wish you were once married. When you are, you'll begin to have a self of your own again. Now you're no better than an unconscious echo."

"Wait for your own turn, my dear," said the mother.

Harry had reached home on a Saturday, and the following Monday was Christmas-day. Lady Clavering, he was told, was at home at the park, and Sir Hugh had been there lately. No one from the house except the servants were seen at church either on the Sunday or on Christmas-day. "But that shows nothing," said the rector, speaking in anger. "He very rarely does come, and when he does, it would be better that he should be away. I think that he likes to insult me by misconducting himself. They say that she is not well, and I can easily believe that all this about her sister makes her unhappy. If I were you I would go up and call. Your mother was there the other day, but did not see them. I think you'll find that he's away, hunting somewhere. I saw the groom going off with three horses on Sunday afternoon. He always sends them by the church gate just as we're coming out."

So Harry went up to the house, and found Lady Clavering at home. She was looking old and careworn, but she was glad to see him. Harry was the only one of the rectory family who had been liked at the great house since Sir Hugh's marriage, and he, had he cared to do so, would have been made welcome there. But, as he had once said to Sir Hugh's sister-in-law, if he shot the Clavering game, he would be expected to do so in the guise of a head gamekeeper, and he did not choose to play that part. It would not suit him to drink Sir Hugh's claret, and be bidden to ring the bell, and to be asked to step into the stable for this or that. He was a fellow of his college, and quite as big a man, he thought, as Sir Hugh. He would not be a hanger-on at the park, and, to tell the truth, he disliked his cousin quite as much as his father did. But there had even been a sort of friendship, — nay, occasionally almost a confidence, between him and Lady Clavering, and he believed that by her he was really liked.

Lady Clavering had heard of his engagement, and of course congratulated him. "Who told you?" he asked, — "was it my mother?"

"No; I have not seen your mother I don't know when. I think it was my maid told me. Though we somehow don't see much of you all at the rectory, our servants are no doubt more gracious with the rectory servants. I'm sure she must be nice, Harry, or you would not have chosen her. I hope she has got some money."

"Yes, I think she is nice. She is coming here at Easter."

"Ah, we shall be away then, you know; and about the money?"

"She will have a little, but very little; — a hundred a year."

"Oh, Harry, is not that rash of you? Younger brothers should always get money. You're the same as a younger brother, you know."

"My idea is to earn my own bread. It's not very aristocratic, but, after all, there are a great many more in the same boat with me."

"Of course you will earn your bread, but having a wife with money would not hinder that. A girl is not the worse because she can bring some help. However, I'm sure I hope you'll be happy."

"What I meant was that I think it best when the money comes from the husband."

"I'm sure I ought to agree with you, because we never had any." Then there was a pause. "I suppose you've heard about Lord Ongar," she said.

"I have heard that he is very ill."

"Very ill. I believe there was no hope when we heard last; but Julia never writes now."

"I'm sorry that it is so bad as that," said Harry, not well knowing what else to say.

"As regards Julia, I do not know whether it may not be for the best. It seems to be a cruel thing to say, but of course I cannot but think most of her. You have heard, perhaps, that they have not been happy?"

"Yes; I had heard that."

"Of course; and what is the use of pretending anything with you? You know what people have said of her."

"I have never believed it."

"You always loved her, Harry. Oh, dear, I remember how unhappy that made me once, and I was

so afraid that Hugh would suspect it. She would never have done for you; — would she, Harry?"

"She did a great deal better for herself," said Harry.

"If you mean that ironically, you shouldn't say it now. If he dies, she will be well off, of course, and people will in time forget what has been said, — that is, if she will live quietly. The worst of it is that she fears nothing."

"But you speak as though you thought she had been — been —"

"I think she was probably imprudent, but I believe nothing worse than that. But who can say what is absolutely wrong, and what only imprudent? I think she was too proud to go really astray. And then with such a man as that, so difficult and so ill-tempered —! Sir Hugh thinks —" But at that moment the door was opened and Sir Hugh came in.

"What does Sir Hugh think?" said he.

"We were speaking of Lord Ongar," said Harry, sitting up and shaking hands with his cousin.

"Then, Harry, you were speaking on a subject that I would rather not have discussed in this house. Do you understand that, Hermione? I will have no talking about Lord Ongar, or his wife. We know very little, and what we hear is simply uncomfortable. Will you dine here to-day, Harry?"

"Thank you, no; I have only just come home."

"And I am just going away. That is, I go to-morrow. I cannot stand this place. I think it the dullest neighbourhood in all England, and the most gloomy house I ever saw. Hermione likes it."

To this last assertion Lady Clavering expressed no assent; nor did she venture to contradict him.

CHAPTER V.

Lady Ongar's Return.

BUT Sir Hugh did not get away from Clavering Park on the next morning as he had intended. There came to him that same afternoon a message by telegraph, to say that Lord Ongar was dead. He had died at Florence on the afternoon of Christmas-day, and Lady Ongar had expressed her intention of coming at once to England.

"Why the devil doesn't she stay where she is?" said Sir Hugh, to his wife. "People would forget her there, and in twelve months' time the row would be all over."

"Perhaps she does not want to be forgotten," said Lady Clavering.

"Then she should want it. I don't care whether she has been guilty or not. When a woman gets her name into such a mess as that, she should keep in the background."

"I think you are unjust to her, Hugh."

"Of course you do. You don't suppose that I expect anything else. But if you mean to tell me that there would have been all this row, if she had been decently prudent, I tell you that you're mistaken."

"Only think what a man he was."

"She knew that when she took him, and should have borne with him while he lasted. A woman isn't to have seven thousand a year for nothing."

"But you forget that not a syllable has been proved against her, or been attempted to be proved. She has never left him, and now she has been with him in his

last moments. I don't think you ought do be the first to turn against her."

"If she would remain abroad, I would do the best I could for her. She chooses to return home; and as I think she's wrong, I won't have her here;—that's all. You don't suppose that I go about the world accusing her?"

"I think you might do something to fight her battle for her."

"I will do nothing, — unless she takes my advice and remains abroad. You must write to her now, and you will tell her what I say. It's an infernal bore, his dying at this moment; but I suppose people won't expect that I'm to shut myself up."

For one day only did the baronet shut himself up, and on the following, he went whither he had before intended.

Lady Clavering thought it proper to write a line to the rectory, informing the family there that Lord Ongar was no more. This she did in a note to Mrs. Clavering; and when it was received, there came over the faces of them all that lugubrious look, which is, as a matter of course, assumed by decorous people when tidings come of the death of any one who has been known to them, even in the most distant way. With the exception of Harry, all the rectory Claverings had been introduced to Lord Ongar, and were now bound to express something approaching to sorrow. Will any one dare to call this hypocrisy? If it be so called, who in the world is not a hypocrite? Where is the man or woman who has not a special face for sorrow before company? The man or woman who has no such face, would at once be accused of heartless impropriety.

"It is very sad," said Mrs. Clavering; "only think, it is but little more than a year since you married them!"

"And twelve such months as they have been for her!" said the rector, shaking his head. His face was very lugubrious, for though as a parson he was essentially a kindly, easy man, to whom humbug was odious, and who dealt little in the austerities of clerical denunciation, still he had his face of pulpit sorrow for the sins of the people, — what I may perhaps call his clerical knack of gentle condemnation, — and could therefore assume a solemn look, and a little saddened motion of his head, with more ease than people who are not often called upon for such action.

"Poor woman!" said Fanny, thinking of the woman's married sorrows, and her early widowhood.

"Poor man," said Mary, shuddering as she thought of the husband's fate.

"I hope," said Harry, almost sententiously, "that no one in this house will condemn her upon such mere rumours as have been heard."

"Why should any one in this house condemn her," said the rector, "even if there were more than rumours? My dears, judge not, lest ye be judged. As regards her, we are bound by close ties not to speak ill of her — or even to think ill, unless we cannot avoid it. As far as I know, we have not even any reason for thinking ill." Then he went out, changed the tone of his countenance among the rectory stables, and lit his cigar.

Three days after that a second note was brought down from the great house to the rectory, and this was from Lady Clavering to Harry. "Dear Harry,"

ran the note, — “Could you find time to come up to me this morning? Sir Hugh has gone to North Priory. — Ever yours, H. C.” Harry, of course, went, and as he went, he wondered how Sir Hugh could have had the heart to go to North Priory at such a moment. North Priory was a hunting seat some thirty miles from Clavering, belonging to a great nobleman with whom Sir Hugh much consorted. Harry was grieved that his cousin had not resisted the temptation of going at such a time, but he was quick enough to perceive that Lady Clavering alluded to the absence of her lord as a reason why Harry might pay his visit to the house with satisfaction.

“I’m so much obliged to you for coming,” said Lady Clavering. “I want to know if you can do something for me.” As she spoke, she had a paper in her hand which he immediately perceived to be a letter from Italy.

“I’ll do anything I can, of course, Lady Clavering.”

“But I must tell you, that I hardly know whether I ought to ask you. I’m doing what would make Hugh very angry. But he is so unreasonable, and so cruel about Julia. He condemns her simply because, as he says, there is no smoke without fire. That is such a cruel thing to say about a woman; — is it not?”

Harry thought that it was a cruel thing, but as he did not wish to speak evil of Sir Hugh before Lady Clavering, he held his tongue.

“When we got the first news by telegraph, Julia said that she intended to come home at once. Hugh thinks that she should remain abroad for some time, and indeed I am not sure but that would be best. At

any rate he made me write to her, and advise her to stay. He declared that if she came at once he would do nothing for her. The truth is, he does not want to have her here, for if she were again in the house he would have to take her part, if ill-natured things were said."

"That's cowardly," said Harry, stoutly.

"Don't say that, Harry, till you have heard it all. If he believes these things, he is right not to wish to meddle. He is very hard, and always believes evil. But he is not a coward. If she were here, living with him as my sister, he would take her part, whatever he might himself think."

"But why should he think ill of his own sister-in-law? I have never thought ill of her."

"You loved her, and he never did; — though I think he liked her too in his way. But that's what he told me to do, and I did it. I wrote to her, advising her to remain at Florence till the warm weather comes, saying that as she could not specially wish to be in London for the season, I thought she would be more comfortable there than here; — and then I added that Hugh also advised her to stay. Of course I did not say that he would not have her here, — but that was his threat."

"She is not likely to press herself where she is not wanted."

"No, — and she will not forget her rank and her money; for that must now be hers. Julia can be quite as hard and as stubborn as he can. But I did write as I say, and I think that if she had got my letter before she had written herself, she would perhaps have stayed. But here is a letter from her, declaring that

she will come at once. She will be starting almost as soon as my letter gets there, and I am sure she will not alter her purpose now."

"I don't see why she should not come if she likes it."

"Only that she might be more comfortable there. But read what she says. You need not read the first part. Not that there is any secret; but it is about him and his last moments, and it would only pain you."

Harry longed to read the whole, but he did as he was bid, and began the letter at the spot which Lady Clavering marked for him with her finger. "I have to start on the third, and as I shall stay nowhere except to sleep at Turin and Paris, I shall be home by the eighth; — I think on the evening of the eighth. I shall bring only my own maid, and one of his men who desires to come back with me. I wish to have apartments taken for me in London. I suppose Hugh will do as much as this for me?"

"I am quite sure Hugh won't," said Lady Clavering, who was watching his eye as he read.

Harry said nothing, but went on reading. "I shall only want two sitting-rooms and two bedrooms, — one for myself and one for Clara, and should like to have them somewhere near Piccadilly, — in Clarges Street, or about there. You can write me a line, or send me a message to the Hôtel Bristol, at Paris. If anything fails, so that I should not hear, I shall go to the Palace Hotel; and in that case, should telegraph for rooms from Paris."

"Is that all I'm to read?" Harry asked.

"You can go on and see what she says as to her reason for coming." So Harry went on reading. "I

have suffered much, and of course I know that I must suffer more; but I am determined that I will face the worst of it at once. It has been hinted to me that an attempt will be made to interfere with the settlement —” “Who can have hinted that?” said Harry. Lady Clavering suspected who might have done so, but she made no answer. “I can hardly think it possible; but if it is done, I will not be out of the way. I have done my duty as best I could, and have done it under circumstances that I may truly say were terrible; — and I will go on doing it. No one shall say that I am ashamed to show my face and claim my own. You will be surprised when you see me. I have aged so much; —”

“You need not go on,” said Lady Clavering. “The rest is about nothing that signifies.”

Then Harry refolded the letter and gave it back to his companion.

“Sir Hugh is gone, and therefore I could not show him that in time to do anything; but if I were to do so, he would simply do nothing, and let her go to the hotel in London. Now that would be unkind; — would it not?”

“Very unkind, I think.”

“It would seem so cold to her on her return.”

“Very cold. Will you not go and meet her?”

Lady Clavering blushed as she answered. Though Sir Hugh was a tyrant to his wife, and known to be such, and though she knew that this was known, she had never said that it was so to any of the Claverings; but now she was driven to confess it. “He would not let me go, Harry. I could not go without telling him, and if I told him he would forbid it.”

"And she is to be all alone in London, without any friend?"

"I shall go to her as soon as he will let me. I don't think he will forbid my going to her, perhaps after a day or two; but I know he would not let me go on purpose to meet her."

"It does seem hard."

"But about the apartments, Harry? I thought that perhaps you would see about them. After all that has passed I could not have asked you, only that now, as you are engaged yourself, it is nearly the same as though you were married. I would ask Archibald, only then there would be a fuss between Archibald and Hugh; and somehow I look on you more as a brother-in-law than I do Archibald."

"Is Archie in London?"

"His address is at his club, but I daresay he is at North Priory also. At any rate, I shall say nothing to him."

"I was thinking he might have met her."

"Julia never liked him. And, indeed, I don't think she will care so much about being met. She was always independent in that way, and would go over the world alone better than many men. But couldn't you run up and manage about the apartments? A woman coming home as a widow, — and in her position, — feels an hotel to be so public."

"I will see about the apartments."

"I knew you would. And there will be time for you to send to me, so that I can write to Paris; — will there not? There is more than a week, you know."

But Henry did not wish to go to London on this

business immediately. He had made up his mind that he would not only take the rooms, but that he would also meet Lady Ongar at the station. He said nothing of this to Lady Clavering, as, perhaps, she might not approve; but such was his intention. He was wrong no doubt. A man in such cases should do what he is asked to do, and do no more. But he repeated to himself the excuse that Lady Clavering had made, — namely, that he was already the same as a married man, and that, therefore, no harm could come of his courtesy to his cousin's wife's sister. But he did not wish to make two journeys to London, nor did he desire to be away for a full week out of his holidays. Lady Clavering could not press him to go at once, and, therefore, it was settled as he proposed. She would write to Paris immediately, and he would go up to London after three or four days. "If we only knew of any apartments, we could write," said Lady Clavering. "You could not know that they were comfortable," said Harry; "and you will find that I will do it in plenty of time." Then he took his leave; but Lady Clavering had still one other word to say to him. "You had better not say anything about all this at the rectory; had you?" Harry, without considering much about it, said that he would not mention it.

Then he went away and walked again about the park, thinking of it all. He had not seen her since he had walked round the park, in his misery, after parting with her in the garden. How much had happened since then! She had been married in her glory, had become a countess, and then a widow, and was now returning with a tarnished name, almost repudiated by those who had been her dearest friends; but with rank

and fortune at her command, — and again a free woman. He could not but think what might have been his chance were it not for Florence Burton! But much had happened to him also. He had almost perished in his misery; — so he told himself; — but had once more “tricked his beams,” — that was his expression to himself, — and was now “flaming in the forehead” of a glorious love. And even if there had been no such love, would a widowed countess with a damaged name have suited his ambition, simply because she had the rich dower of the poor wretch to whom she had sold herself? No, indeed. There could be no question of renewed vows between them now; — there could have been no such question even had there been no “glorious love,” which had accrued to him almost as his normal privilege in right of his pupilage in Mr. Burton’s office. No; — there could be, there could have been, nothing now between him and the widowed Countess of Ongar. But, nevertheless, he liked the idea of meeting her in London. He felt some triumph in the thought that he should be the first to touch her hand on her return after all that she had suffered. He would be very courteous to her, and would spare no trouble that would give her any ease. As for her rooms, he would see to everything of which he could think that might add to her comfort; and a wish crept upon him, uninvited, that she might be conscious of what he had done for her.

Would she be aware, he wondered, that he was engaged? Lady Clavering had known it for the last three months, and would probably have mentioned the circumstance in a letter. But perhaps not. The sisters, he knew, had not been good correspondents; and he

almost wished that she might not know it. "I should not care to be talking to her about Florence," he said to himself.

It was very strange that they should come to meet in such a way, after all that had passed between them in former days. Would it occur to her that he was the only man she had ever loved? — for, of course, as he well knew, she had never loved her husband. Or would she now be too callous to everything but the outer world to think at all of such a subject? She had said that she was aged, and he could well believe it. Then he pictured her to himself in her weeds, worn, sad, thin, but still proud and handsome. He had told Florence of his early love for the woman whom Lord Ongar had married, and had described with rapture his joy that that early passion had come to nothing. Now he would have to tell Florence of this meeting; and he thought of the comparison he would make between her bright young charms and the shipwrecked beauty of the widow. On the whole, he was proud that he had been selected for the commission, as he liked to think of himself as one to whom things happened which were out of the ordinary course. His only objection to Florence was that she had come to him so much in the ordinary course.

"I suppose the truth is you are tired of our dullness?" said his father to him, when he declared his purpose of going up to London, and, in answer to certain questions that were asked him, had hesitated to tell his business.

"Indeed, it is not so," said Harry, earnestly; "but I have a commission to execute for a certain person, and I cannot explain what it is."

"Another secret; — eh, Harry?"

"I am very sorry, — but it is a secret. It is not one of my own seeking; that is all I can say." His mother and sisters also asked him a question or two; but when he became mysterious, they did not persevere. "Of course it is something about Florence," said Fanny. "I'll be bound he is going to meet her. What will you bet me, Harry, you don't go to the play with Florence before you come home?" To this Henry deigned no answer; and after that no more questions were asked.

He went up to London and took rooms in Bolton Street. There was a pretty fresh-looking light drawing-room, or, indeed, two drawing-rooms, and a small dining-room, and a large bed-room looking over upon the trees of some great nobleman's garden. As Harry stood at the window it seemed so odd to him that he should be there. And he was busy about everything in the chamber, seeing that all things were clean and well ordered. Was the woman of the house sure of her cook? Sure; of course she was sure. Had not old Lady Dimdaff lived there for two years, and nobody ever was so particular about her victuals as Lady Dimdaff. "And would Lady Ongar keep her own carriage?" As to this Harry could say nothing. Then came the question of price, and Harry found his commission very difficult. The sum asked seemed to be enormous. "Seven guineas a week at that time of the year!" Lady Dimdaff had always paid seven guineas. "But that was in the season," suggested Harry. To this the woman replied that it was the season now. Harry felt that he did not like to drive a bargain for the Countess, who would probably care

very little what she paid, and therefore assented. But a guinea a day for lodgings did seem a great deal of money. He was prepared to marry and commence housekeeping upon a less sum for all his expenses. However, he had done his commission, had written to Lady Clavering, and had telegraphed to Paris. He had almost brought himself to write to Lady Ongar, but when the moment came he abstained. He had sent the telegram as from H. Clavering. She might think that it came from Hugh if she pleased.

He was unable not to attend specially to his dress when he went to meet her at the Victoria Station. He told himself that he was an ass, — but still he went on being an ass. During the whole afternoon he could do nothing but think of what he had in hand. He was to tell Florence everything, but had Florence known the actual state of his mind, I doubt whether she would have been satisfied with him. The train was due at 8 P.M. He dined at the Oxford and Cambridge Club at six, and then went to his lodgings to take one last look at his outer man. The evening was very fine, but he went down to the station in a cab, because he would not meet Lady Ongar in soiled boots. He told himself again that he was an ass; and then tried to console himself by thinking that such an occasion as this seldom happened once to any man, — could hardly happen more than once to any man. He had hired a carriage for her, not thinking it fit that Lady Ongar should be taken to her new home in a cab; and when he was at the station, half an hour before the proper time, was very fidgety because it had not come. Ten minutes before eight he might have been seen standing at the entrance to the station

looking out anxiously for the vehicle. The man was there, of course, in time, but Harry made himself angry because he could not get the carriage so placed that Lady Ongar might be sure of stepping into it without leaving the platform. Punctually to the moment the coming train announced itself by its whistle, and Harry Clavering felt himself to be in a flutter.

The train came up along the platform, and Harry stood there expecting to see Julia Brabazon's head projected from the first window that caught his eye. It was of Julia Brabazon's head, and not of Lady Ongar's, that he was thinking. But he saw no sign of her presence while the carriages were coming to a stand-still, and the platform was covered with passengers before he discovered her whom he was seeking. At last he encountered in the crowd a man in livery, and found from him that he was Lady Ongar's servant. "I have come to meet Lady Ongar," said Harry, "and have got a carriage for her." Then the servant found his mistress, and Harry offered his hand to a tall woman in black. She wore a black straw hat with a veil, but the veil was so thick that Harry could not at all see her face.

"Is that Mr. Clavering?" said she.

"Yes," said Harry, "it is I. Your sister asked me to take rooms for you, and as I was in town I thought I might as well meet you to see if you wanted anything. Can I get the luggage?"

"Thank you; — the man will do that. He knows where the things are."

"I ordered a carriage; — shall I show him where it is? Perhaps you will let me take you to it? They

are so stupid here. They would not let me bring it up."

"It will do very well I'm sure. It's very kind of you. The rooms are in Bolton Street. I have the number here. Oh! thank you." But she would not take his arm. So he led the way, and stood at the door while she got into the carriage with her maid. "I'd better show the man where you are now." This he did, and afterwards shook hands with her through the carriage window. This was all he saw of her, and the words which have been repeated were all that were spoken. Of her face he had not caught a glimpse.

As he went home to his lodgings he was conscious that the interview had not been satisfactory. He could not say what more he wanted, but he felt that there was something amiss. He consoled himself, however, by reminding himself that Florence Burton was the girl whom he had really loved, and not Julia Brabazon. Lady Ongar had given him no invitation to come and see her, and therefore he determined that he would return home on the following day without going near Bolton Street. He had pictured to himself beforehand the sort of description he would give to Lady Clavering of her sister; but, seeing how things had turned out, he made up his mind that he would say nothing of the meeting. Indeed, he would not go up to the great house at all. He had done Lady Clavering's commission, — at some little trouble and expense to himself, and there should be an end of it. Lady Ongar would not mention that she had seen him. He doubted, indeed, whether she would remember whom she had seen. For any good that he had done, or for any sentiment that there had been, his cousin Hugh's

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butler might as well have gone to the train. In this mood he returned home, consoling himself with the fitness of things which had given him Florence Burton instead of Julia Brabazon for a wife.

CHAPTER VI.

The Rev. Samuel Saul.

DURING Harry's absence in London, a circumstance had occurred at the rectory which had surprised some of them and annoyed others a good deal. Mr. Saul, the curate, had made an offer to Fanny. The Rector and Fanny declared themselves to be both surprised and annoyed. That the Rector was in truth troubled by the thing was very evident. Mrs. Clavering said that she had almost suspected it, — that she was at any rate not surprised; as to the offer itself, of course she was sorry that it should have been made, as it could not suit Fanny to accept it. Mary was surprised, as she had thought Mr. Saul to be wholly intent on other things; but she could not see any reason why the offer should be regarded as being on his part unreasonable.

"How can you say so, mamma?" Such had been Fanny's indignant exclamation when Mrs. Clavering had hinted that Mr. Saul's proceeding had been expected by her.

"Simply because I saw that he liked you, my dear. Men under such circumstances have different ways of showing their liking."

Fanny, who had seen all of Mary's love-affair from the beginning to the end, and who had watched the Reverend Edward Fielding in all his very conspicuous

manœuvres, would not agree to this. Edward Fielding from the first moment of his intimate acquaintance with Mary had left no doubt of his intentions on the mind of any one. He had talked to Mary and walked with Mary whenever he was allowed or found it possible to do so. When driven to talk to Fanny, he had always talked about Mary. He had been a lover of the good, old, plainspoken stamp, about whom there had been no mistake. From the first moment of his coming much about Clavering Rectory the only question had been about his income. "I don't think Mr. Saul ever said a word to me except about the poor people and the church services," said Fanny. "That was merely his way," said Mrs. Clavering. "Then he must be a goose," said Fanny. "I am very sorry if I have made him unhappy, but he had no business to come to me in that way."

"I suppose I shall have to look for another curate," said the Rector. But this was said in private to his wife.

"I don't see that at all," said Mrs. Clavering. "With many men it would be so; but I think you will find that he will take an answer, and that there will be an end of it."

Fanny, perhaps, had a right to be indignant, for certainly Mr. Saul had given her no fair warning of his intention. Mary had for some months been intent rather on Mr. Fielding's church matters than on those going on in her own parish, and therefore there had been nothing singular in the fact that Mr. Saul had said more on such matters to Fanny than to her sister. Fanny was eager and active, and as Mr. Saul was very eager and very active, it was natural that they should

have had some interests in common. But there had been no private walkings, and no talkings that could properly be called private. There was a certain book which Fanny kept, containing the names of all the poor people in the parish, to which Mr. Saul had access equally with herself; but its contents were of a most prosaic nature, and when she had sat over it in the rectory drawing-room, with Mr. Saul by her side, striving to extract more than twelve pennies out of charity shillings, she had never thought that it would lead to a declaration of love.

He had never called her Fanny in his life, — not up to the moment when she declined the honour of becoming Mrs. Saul. The offer itself was made in this wise. She had been at the house of old Widow Tubb, half-way between Cumberly Green and the little village of Clavering, striving to make that rheumatic old woman believe that she had not been cheated by a general conspiracy of the parish in the matter of a distribution of coal, when, just as she was about to leave the cottage, Mr. Saul came up. It was then past four, and the evening was becoming dark, and there was, moreover, a slight drizzle of rain. It was not a tempting evening for a walk of a mile and a half through a very dirty lane; but Fanny Clavering did not care much for such things, and was just stepping out into the mud and moisture, with her dress well looped up, when Mr. Saul accosted her.

“I’m afraid you’ll be very wet, Miss Clavering.”

“That will be better than going without my cup of tea, Mr. Saul, which I should have to do if I stayed any longer with Mrs. Tubb. And I have got an umbrella.”

"But it is so dark and dirty," said he.

"I'm used to that, as you ought to know."

"Yes; I do know it," said he, walking on with her.

"I do know that nothing ever turns you away from the good work."

There was something in the tone of his voice which Fanny did not like. He had never complimented her before. They had been very intimate and had often scolded each other. Fanny would accuse him of exacting too much from the people, and he would retort upon her that she coddled them. Fanny would often decline to obey him, and he would make angry hints as to his clerical authority. In this way they had worked together pleasantly, without any of the awkwardness which on other terms would have arisen between a young man and a young woman. But now that he began to praise her with some peculiar intention of meaning in his tone, she was confounded. She had made no immediate answer to him, but walked on rapidly through the mud and slush.

"You are very constant," said he; "I have not been two years at Clavering without finding that out." It was becoming worse and worse. It was not so much his words which provoked her as the tone in which they were uttered. And yet she had not the slightest idea of what was coming. If, thoroughly admiring her devotion and mistaken as to her character, he were to ask her to become a Protestant nun, or suggest to her that she should leave her home and go as nurse into a hospital, then there would have occurred the sort of folly of which she believed him to be capable. Of the folly which he now committed, she had not believed him to be capable.

It had come on to rain hard, and she held her umbrella low over her head. He also was walking with an open umbrella in his hand, so that they were not very close to each other. Fanny, as she stepped on impetuously, put her foot into the depth of a pool, and splashed herself thoroughly.

"Oh dear, oh dear," said she; "this is very disagreeable."

"Miss Clavering," said he, "I have been looking for an opportunity to speak to you, and I do not know when I may find another so suitable as this." She still believed that some proposition was to be made to her which would be disagreeable, and perhaps impertinent, — but it never occurred to her that Mr. Saul was in want of a wife.

"Doesn't it rain too hard for talking!" she said.

"As I have begun I must go on with it now," he replied, raising his voice a little, as though it were necessary that he should do so to make her hear him through the rain and darkness. She moved a little further away from him with unthinking irritation; but still he went on with his purpose. "Miss Clavering, I know that I am ill-suited to play the part of a lover; — very ill-suited." Then she gave a start and again splashed herself sadly. "I have never read how it is done in books, and have not allowed my imagination to dwell much on such things."

"Mr. Saul, don't go on; pray don't." Now she did understand what was coming.

"Yes, Miss Clavering, I must go on now; but not on that account would I press you to give me an answer to-day. I have learned to love you, and if you can love me in return, I will take you by the hand,

and you shall be my wife. I have found that in you which I have been unable not to love, — not to covet that I may bind it to myself as my own for ever. Will you think of this, and give me an answer when you have considered it fully?"

He had not spoken altogether amiss, and Fanny, though she was very angry with him, was conscious of this. The time he had chosen might not be considered suitable for a declaration of love, nor the place; but having chosen them, he had, perhaps, made the best of them. There had been no hesitation in his voice, and his words had been perfectly audible.

"Oh, Mr. Saul, of course I can assure you at once," said Fanny. "There need not be any consideration. I really have never thought ——" Fanny, who knew her own mind on the matter thoroughly, was hardly able to express herself plainly and without incivility. As soon as that phrase "of course" had passed her lips, she felt that it should not have been spoken. There was no need that she should insult him by telling him that such a proposition from him could have but one answer.

"No, Miss Clavering; I know you have never thought of it, and therefore it would be well that you should take time. I have not been able to make manifest to you by little signs, as men do who are less awkward, all the love that I have felt for you. Indeed, could I have done so, I should still have hesitated till I had thoroughly resolved that I might be better with a wife than without one; and had resolved also, as far as that might be possible for me, that you also would be better with a husband."

"Mr. Saul, really that should be for me to think of."

"And for me also. Can any man offer to marry a woman, — to bind a woman for life to certain duties, and to so close an obligation, without thinking whether such bonds would be good for her as well as for himself? Of course you must think for yourself; — and so have I thought for you. You should think for yourself, and you should think also for me."

Fanny was quite aware that as regarded herself, the matter was one which required no more thinking. Mr. Saul was not a man with whom she could bring herself to be in love. She had her own ideas as to what was loveable in men, and the eager curate, splashing through the rain by her side, by no means came up to her standard of excellence. She was unconsciously aware that he had altogether mistaken her character, and given her credit for more abnegation of the world than she pretended to possess, or was desirous of possessing. Fanny Clavering was in no hurry to get married. I do not know that she had even made up her mind that marriage would be a good thing for her; but she had an untroubled conviction that if she did marry, her husband should have a house and an income. She had no reliance on her own power of living on a potato, and with one new dress every year. A comfortable home, with nice, comfortable things around her, ease in money matters, and elegance in life, were charms with which she had not quarrelled, and though she did not wish to be hard upon Mr. Saul on account of his mistake, she did feel that in making his proposition he had blundered. Because she chose to do her duty as a parish clergyman's daughter, he thought himself entitled to regard her as a devotee, who would be willing to resign everything to become the wife of a

clergyman, who was active, indeed, but who had not one shilling of income beyond his curacy. "Mr. Saul," she said, "I can assure you I need take no time for further thinking. It cannot be as you would have it."

"Perhaps I have been abrupt. Indeed, I feel that it is so, though I did not know how to avoid it."

"It would have made no difference. Indeed, indeed, Mr. Saul, nothing of that kind could have made a difference."

"Will you grant me this; — that I may speak to you again on the same subject after six months?"

"It cannot do any good."

"It will do this good; — that for so much time you will have had the idea before you." Fanny thought that she would have Mr. Saul himself before her, and that that would be enough. Mr. Saul, with his rusty clothes and his thick, dirty shoes, and his weak, blinking eyes, and his mind always set upon the one wish of his life, could not be made to present himself to her in the guise of a lover. He was one of those men of whom women become very fond with the fondness of friendship, but from whom young women seem to be as far removed in the way of love as though they belonged to some other species. "I will not press you further," said he, "as I gather by your tone that it distresses you."

"I am so sorry if I distress you, but really, Mr. Saul, I could give you, — I never could give you any other answer."

Then they walked on silently through the rain, — silently, without a single word, — for more than half a mile, till they reached the rectory gate. Here it was necessary that they should, at any rate, speak to

each other, and for the last three hundred yards Fanny had been trying to find the words which would be suitable. But he was the first to break the silence. "Good-night, Miss Clavering," he said, stopping and putting out his hand.

"Good-night, Mr. Saul."

"I hope that there may be no difference in our bearing to each other, because of what I have to-day said to you?"

"Not on my part; — that is, if you will forget it."

"No, Miss Clavering; I shall not forget it. If it had been a thing to be forgotten, I should not have spoken. I certainly shall not forget it."

"You know what I mean, Mr. Saul."

"I shall not forget it even in the way that you mean. But still I think you need not fear me, because you know that I love you. I think I can promise that you need not withdraw yourself from me, because of what has passed. But you will tell your father and your mother, and of course will be guided by them. And now, good-night." Then he went, and she was astonished at finding that he had had much the best of it in his manner of speaking and conducting himself. She had refused him very curtly, and he had borne it well. He had not been abashed, nor had he become sulky, nor had he tried to melt her by mention of his own misery. In truth he had done it very well, — only that he should have known better than to make any such attempt at all.

Mr. Saul had been right in one thing. Of course she told her mother, and of course her mother told her father. Before dinner that evening the whole affair was being debated in the family conclave. They all

agreed that Fanny had had no alternative but to reject the proposition at once. That, indeed, was so thoroughly taken for granted, that the point was not discussed. But there came to be a difference between the Rector and Fanny on one side, and Mrs. Clavering and Mary on the other. "Upon my word," said the Rector, "I think it was very impertinent." Fanny would not have liked to use that word herself, but she loved her father for using it.

"I do not see that," said Mrs. Clavering. "He could not know what Fanny's views in life might be. Curates very often marry out of the houses of the clergymen with whom they are placed, and I do not see why Mr. Saul should be debarred from the privilege of trying."

"If he had got to like Fanny what else was he to do?" said Mary.

"Oh, Mary, don't talk such nonsense," said Fanny. "Got to like! People shouldn't get to like people unless there's some reason for it."

"What on earth did he intend to live on?" demanded the rector.

"Edward had nothing to live on, when you first allowed him to come here," said Mary.

"But Edward had prospects, and Saul, as far as I know, has none. He had given no one the slightest notice. If the man in the moon had come to Fanny I don't suppose she would have been more surprised."

"Not half so much, papa."

Then it was that Mrs. Clavering had declared that she was not surprised, — that she had suspected it, and had almost made Fanny angry by saying so. When Harry came back two days afterwards, the family news was imparted to him, and he immediately ranged

himself on his father's side. "Upon my word I think that he ought to be forbidden the house," said Harry. "He has forgotten himself in making such a proposition."

"That's nonsense, Harry," said his mother. "If he can be comfortable coming here, there can be no reason why he should be uncomfortable. It would be an injustice to him to ask him to go, and a great trouble to your father to find another curate that would suit him so well." There could be no doubt whatever as to the latter proposition, and therefore it was quietly argued that Mr. Saul's fault, if there had been a fault, should be condoned. On the next day he came to the rectory, and they were all astonished at the ease with which he bore himself. It was not that he affected any special freedom of manner, or that he altogether avoided any change in his mode of speaking to them. A slight blush came upon his sallow face as he first spoke to Mrs. Clavering, and he hardly did more than say a single word to Fanny. But he carried himself as though conscious of what he had done, but in no degree ashamed of the doing it. The rector's manner to him was stiff and formal; — seeing which Mrs. Clavering spoke to him gently, and with a smile. "I saw you were a little hard on him, and therefore I tried to make up for it," said she afterwards. "You were quite right," said the husband. "You always are. But I wish he had not made such a fool of himself. It will never be the same thing with him again." Harry hardly spoke to Mr. Saul the first time he met him, all of which Mr. Saul understood perfectly. .

"Clavering," he said to Harry, a day or two after

this, "I hope there is to be no difference between you and me."

"Difference! I don't know what you mean by difference."

"We were good friends, and I hope that we are to remain so. No doubt you know what has taken place between me and your sister."

"Oh, yes; — I have been told, of course."

"What I mean is, that I hope you are not going to quarrel with me on that account? What I did, is it not what you would have done in my position? — only you would have done it successfully?"

"I think a fellow should have some income, you know."

"Can you say that you would have waited for income before you spoke of marriage?"

"I think it might have been better that you should have gone to my father."

"It may be that that is the rule in such things, but if so I do not know it. Would she have liked that better?"

"Well; — I can't say."

"You are engaged? Did you go to the young lady's family first?"

"I can't say I did; but I think I had given them some ground to expect it. I fancy they all knew what I was about. But it's over now, and I don't know that we need say anything more about it."

"Certainly not. Nothing can be said that would be of any use; but I do not think I have done anything that you should resent."

"Resent is a strong word. I don't resent it, or, at any rate, I won't; and there may be an end of it."

After this, Harry was more gracious with Mr. Saul, having an idea that the curate had made some sort of apology for what he had done. But that, I fancy, was by no means Mr. Saul's view of the case. Had he offered to marry the daughter of the Archbishop of Canterbury, instead of the daughter of the Rector of Clavering, he would not have imagined that his doing so needed an apology.

The day after his return from London Lady Clavering sent for Harry up to the house. "So you saw my sister in London?" she said.

"Yes," said Harry blushing; "as I was in town, I thought that I might as well meet her. But, as you said, Lady Ongar is able to do without much assistance of that kind. I only just saw her."

"Julia took it so kindly of you; but she seems surprised that you did not come to her the following day. She thought you would have called."

"Oh, dear, no. I fancied that she would be too tired and too busy to wish to see any mere acquaintance."

"Ah, Harry, I see that she has angered you," said Lady Clavering; "otherwise you would not talk about mere acquaintance."

"Not in the least. Angered me! How could she anger me? What I meant was that at such a time she would probably wish to see no one but people on business, — unless it was some one near to her, like yourself or Hugh."

"Hugh will not go to her."

CHAPTER VII.

Some Scenes in the Life of a Countess.

ABOUT the middle of January Harry Clavering went up to London, and settled himself to work at Mr. Beilby's office. Mr. Beilby's office consisted of four or five large chambers, overlooking the river from the bottom of Adam Street in the Adelphi, and here Harry found a table for himself in the same apartment with three other pupils. It was a fine old room, lofty, and with large windows, ornamented on the ceiling with Italian scroll-work, and a flying goddess in the centre. In days gone by the house had been the habitation of some great rich man, who had there enjoyed the sweet breezes from the river before London had become the London of the present days, and when no embankment had been needed for the Thames. Nothing could be nicer than his room, or more pleasant than the table and seat which he was to occupy near a window; but there was something in the tone of the other men towards him which did not quite satisfy him. They probably did not know that he was a fellow of a college, and treated him almost as they might have done had he come to them direct from King's College, in the Strand, or from the London University. Down at Stratton, a certain amount of honour had been paid to him. They had known there who he was, and had felt some deference for him. They had not slapped him on the back, or poked him in the ribs, or even called him old fellow, before some length of acquaintance justified such appellation. But up at Mr. Beilby's, in the Adelphi, one young man, who was certainly his junior in age, and who did not seem as yet to have

attained any high position in the science of engineering, manifestly thought that he was acting in a friendly and becoming way by declaring the stranger to be a lad of wax on the second day of his appearance. Harry Clavering was not disinclined to believe that he was a "lad of wax," or "a brick," or "a trump," or "no small beer." But he desired that such complimentary and endearing appellations should be used to him only by those who had known him long enough to be aware that he deserved them. Mr. Joseph Walliker certainly was not as yet among this number.

There was a man at Mr. Beilby's, who was entitled to greet him with endearing terms, and to be so greeted himself, although Harry had never seen him till he attended for the first time at the Adelphi. This was Theodore Burton, his future brother-in-law, who was now the leading man in the London house:—the leading man as regarded business, though he was not as yet a partner. It was understood that this Mr. Burton was to come in when his father went out; and in the meantime he received a salary of a thousand a year as managing clerk. A very hard-working, steady, intelligent man was Mr. Theodore Burton, with a bald head, a high forehead, and that look of constant work about him which such men obtain. Harry Clavering could not bring himself to take a liking to him, because he wore cotton gloves and had an odious habit of dusting his shoes with his pocket-handkerchief. Twice Harry saw him do this on the first day of their acquaintance, and he regretted it exceedingly. The cotton gloves too were offensive, as were also the thick shoes which had been dusted; but the dusting was the great sin.

And there was something which did not quite please Harry in Mr. Theodore Burton's manner, though the gentleman had manifestly intended to be very kind to him. When Burton had been speaking to him for a minute or two, it flashed across Harry's mind that he had not bound himself to marry the whole Burton family, and that, perhaps, he must take some means to let that fact be known. "Theodore," as he had so often heard the younger Mr. Burton called by loving lips, seemed to claim him as his own, called him Harry, and upbraided him with friendly warmth for not having come direct to his — Mr. Burton's — house in Onslow Crescent. "Pray feel yourself at home there," said Mr. Burton. "I hope you'll like my wife. You needn't be afraid of being made to be idle if you spend your evenings there, for we are all reading people. Will you come and dine to-day?" Florence had told him that she was her brother Theodore's favourite sister, and that Theodore, as a husband and a brother, and a man, was perfect. But Theodore had dusted his boots with his handkerchief, and Harry Clavering would not dine with him on that day.

And then it was painfully manifest to him that every one in the office knew his destiny with reference to old Burton's daughter. He had been one of the Stratton men, and no more than any other had he gone unscathed through the Stratton fire. He had been made to do the regular thing, as Granger, Scarness, and others had done it. Stratton would be safer ground now, as Clavering had taken the last. That was the feeling on the matter which seemed to belong to others. It was not that Harry thought in this way of his own Florence. He knew well enough what a lucky fellow

he was to have won such a girl. He was well aware how widely his Florence differed from Carry Scarness. He denied to himself indignantly that he had any notion of repenting what he had done. But he did wish that these private matters might have remained private, and that all the men at Beilby's had not known of his engagement. When Walliker, on the fourth day of their acquaintance, asked him if it was all right at Stratton, he made up his mind that he hated Walliker, and that he would hate Walliker to the last day of his life. He had declined the first invitation given to him by Theodore Burton; but he could not altogether avoid his future brother-in-law, and had agreed to dine with him on this day.

On that same afternoon Harry, when he left Mr. Beilby's office, went direct to Bolton Street, that he might call on Lady Ongar. As he went thither he bethought himself that these Wallikers and the like had had no such events in life as had befallen him! They laughed at him about Florence Burton, little guessing that it had been his lot to love and to be loved by such a one as Julia Brabazon had been, — such a one as Lady Ongar now was. But things had gone well with him. Julia Brabazon could have made no man happy, but Florence Burton would be the sweetest, dearest, truest little wife that ever man took to his home. He was thinking of this, and determined to think of it more and more daily, as he knocked at Lady Ongar's door. "Yes; her ladyship was at home," said the servant whom he had seen on the railway platform; and in a few moments' time he found himself in the drawing-room which he had criticized so carefully when he was taking it for its present occupant.

He was left in the room for five or six minutes, and was able to make a full mental inventory of its contents. It was very different in its present aspect from the room which he had seen not yet a month since. She had told him that the apartments had been all that she desired; but since then everything had been altered, at least in appearance. A new piano had been brought in, and the chintz on the furniture was surely new. And the room was crowded with small feminine belongings, indicative of wealth and luxury. There were ornaments about, and pretty toys, and a thousand knick-knacks which none but the rich can possess, and which none can possess even among the rich unless they can give taste as well as money to their acquisition. Then he heard a light step; the door opened, and Lady Ongar was there.

He expected to see the same figure that he had seen on the railway platform, the same gloomy drapery, the same quiet, almost deathlike demeanour, nay, almost the same veil over her features; but the Lady Ongar whom he now saw was as unlike that Lady Ongar as she was unlike that Julia Brabazon whom he had known in old days at Clavering Park. She was dressed, no doubt, in black; nay, no doubt, she was dressed in weeds; but in spite of the black and in spite of the weeds there was nothing about her of the weariness or of the solemnity of woe. He hardly saw that her dress was made of crape, or that long white pendants were hanging down from the cap which sat so prettily upon her head. But it was her face at which he gazed. At first he thought that she could hardly be the same woman, she was to his eyes so much older than she had been! And yet as he looked

at her, he found that she was as handsome as ever, — more handsome than she had ever been before. There was a dignity about her face and figure which became her well, and which she carried as though she knew herself to be in very truth a countess. It was a face which bore well such signs of age as those which had come upon it. She seemed to be a woman fitter for womanhood than for girlhood. Her eyes were brighter than of yore, and, as Harry thought, larger; and her high forehead and noble stamp of countenance seemed fitted for the dress and headgear which she wore.

"I have been expecting you," said she, stepping up to him. "Hermione wrote me word that you were to come up on Monday. Why did you not come sooner?" There was a smile on her face as she spoke, and a confidence in her tone which almost confounded him.

"I have had so many things to do," said he lamely.

"About your new profession? Yes, I can understand that. And so you are settled in London now? Where are you living; — that is, if you are settled yet?" In answer to this, Harry told her that he had taken lodgings in Bloomsbury Square, blushing somewhat as he named so unfashionable a locality. Old Mrs. Burton had recommended him to the house in which he was located, but he did not find it necessary to explain that fact to Lady Ongar.

"I have to thank you for what you did for me," continued she. "You ran away from me in such a hurry on that night that I was unable to speak to you. But to tell the truth, Harry, I was in no mood then to

“speak to any one. Of course you thought that I treated you ill.”

“Oh, no,” said he.

“Of course you did. If I thought you did not, I should be angry with you now. But had it been to save my life I could not have helped it. Why did not Sir Hugh Clavering come to meet me? Why did not my sister’s husband come to me?” To this question Harry could make no answer. He was still standing with his hat in his hand, and now turned his face away from her and shook his head.

“Sit down, Harry,” she said, “and let me talk to you like a friend; — unless you are in a hurry to go away?”

“Oh, no,” said he, seating himself.

“Or unless you, too, are afraid of me.”

“Afraid of you, Lady Ongar?”

“Yes, afraid; but I don’t mean you. I don’t believe that you are coward enough to desert a woman who was once your friend because misfortune has overtaken her, and calumny has been at work with her name.”

“I hope not,” said he.

“No, Harry; I do not think it of you. But if Sir Hugh be not a coward, why did he not come and meet me? Why has he left me to stand alone, now that he could be of service to me? I knew that money was his god, but I have never asked him for a shilling and should not have done so now. Oh, Harry, how wicked you were about that cheque! Do you remember?”

“Yes; I remember.”

“So shall I; always, always. If I had taken that money how often should I have heard of it since?”

"Heard of it?" he asked. "Do you mean from me?"

"Yes; how often from you? Would you have dunned me, and told me of it once a week? Upon my word, Harry, I was told of it more nearly every day. Is it not wonderful that men should be so mean?"

It was clear to him now that she was talking of her husband who was dead, and on that subject he felt himself at present unable to speak a word. He little dreamed at that moment how openly she would soon speak to him of Lord Ongar and of Lord Ongar's faults!

"Oh, how I have wished that I had taken your money! But never mind about that now, Harry. Wretched as such taunts were, they soon became a small thing. But it has been cowardly in your cousin, Hugh; has it not? If I had not lived with him as one of his family, it would not have mattered. People would not have expected it. It was as though my own brother had cast me forth."

"Lady Clavering has been with you; has she not?"

"Once, for half-an-hour. She came up for one day, and came here by herself, cowering as though she were afraid of me. Poor Hermy! She has not a good time of it either. You lords of creation lead your slaves sad lives when it pleases you to change your billing and cooing for matter-of-fact masterdom and rule. I don't blame Hermy. I suppose she did all she could, and I did not utter one word of reproach of her. Nor should I to him. Indeed, if he came now the servant would deny me to him. He has insulted me, and I shall remember the insult."

Harry Clavering did not clearly understand what it was that Lady Ongar had desired of her brother-in-law, — what aid she had required; nor did he know whether it would be fitting for him to offer to act in Sir Hugh's place. Anything that he could do, he felt himself at that moment willing to do, even though the necessary service should demand some sacrifice greater than prudence could approve. "If I had thought that anything was wanted, I should have come to you sooner," said he.

"Everything is wanted, Harry. Everything is wanted; — except that cheque for six hundred pounds which you sent me so treacherously. Did you ever think what might have happened if a certain person had heard of that? All the world would have declared that you had done it for your own private purposes; — all the world, except one."

Harry, as he heard this, felt that he was blushing. Did Lady Ongar know of his engagement with Florence Burton? Lady Clavering knew it, and might probably have told the tidings; but then, again, she might not have told them. Harry at this moment wished that he knew how it was. All that Lady Ongar said to him would come with so different a meaning according as she did, or did not know that fact. But he had no mind to tell her of the fact himself. He declared to himself that he hoped she knew it, as it would serve to make them both more comfortable together; but he did not think that it would do for him to bring forward the subject, neck and heels as it were. The proper thing would be that she should congratulate him, but this she did not do. "I certainly meant no ill," he said, in answer to the last words she had spoken.

"You have never meant ill to me, Harry; though you know you have abused me dreadfully before now. I daresay you forget the hard names you have called me. You men do forget such things."

"I remember calling you one name."

"Do not repeat it now, if you please. If I deserved it, it would shame me; and if I did not, it should shame you."

"No; I will not repeat it."

"Does it not seem odd, Harry, that you and I should be sitting, talking together in this way?" She was leaning now towards him, across the table, and one hand was raised to her forehead while her eyes were fixed intently upon his. The attitude was one which he felt to express extreme intimacy. She would not have sat in that way, pressing back her hair from her brow, with all appearance of widowhood banished from her face, in the presence of any but a dear and close friend. He did not think of this, but he felt that it was so, almost by instinct. "I have such a tale to tell you," she said; "such a tale!"

Why should she tell it to him? Of course he asked himself this question. Then he remembered that she had no brother, — remembered also that her brother-in-law had deserted her, and he declared to himself that, if necessary, he would be her brother. "I fear that you have not been happy," said he, "since I saw you last."

"Happy!" she replied. "I have lived such a life as I did not think any man or woman could be made to live on this side the grave. I will be honest with you, Harry. Nothing but the conviction that it could

not be for long, has saved me from destroying myself. I knew that he must die!"

"Oh, Lady Ongar!"

"Yes, indeed; that is the name he gave me; and because I consented to take it from him, he treated me; — O heavens! how am I to find words to tell you what he did, and the way in which he treated me! A woman could not tell it to a man. Harry, I have no friend that I trust but you, but to you I cannot tell it. When he found that he had been wrong in marrying me, that he did not want the thing which he had thought would suit him, that I was a drag upon him rather than a comfort, — what was his mode, do you think, of ridding himself of the burden?" Clavering sat silent, looking at her. Both her hands were now up to her forehead, and her large eyes were gazing at him till he found himself unable to withdraw his own for a moment from her face. "He strove to get another man to take me off his hands; and when he found that he was failing, — he charged me with the guilt which he himself had contrived for me."

"Lady Ongar!"

"Yes; you may well stare at me. You may well speak hoarsely and look like that. It may be that even you will not believe me; — but by the God in whom we both believe, I tell you nothing but the truth. He attempted that and he failed, — and then he accused me of the crime which he could not bring me to commit."

"And what then?"

"Yes; what then? Harry, I had a thing to do, and a life to live, that would have tried the bravest; but I went through it. I stuck to him to the last!

He told me before he was dying, — before that last frightful illness, that I was staying with him for his money. ‘For your money, my lord,’ I said, ‘and for my own name.’ And so it was. Would it have been wise in me, after all that I had gone through, to have given up that for which I had sold myself? I had been very poor, and had been so placed that poverty, even such poverty as mine, was a curse to me. You know what I gave up because I feared that curse. Was I to be foiled at last, because such a creature as that wanted to shirk out of his bargain? I knew there were some who would say I had been false. Hugh Clavering says so now, I suppose. But they never should say I had left him to die alone in a foreign land.”

“Did he ask you to leave him?”

“No; — but he called me that name which no woman should hear and stay. No woman should do so unless she had a purpose such as mine. He wanted back the price that he had paid, and I was determined to do nothing that should assist him in his meanness! And then, Harry, his last illness! Oh, Harry, you would pity me if you could know all!”

“It was his own intemperance!”

“Intemperance! It was brandy, — sheer brandy. He brought himself to such a state that nothing but brandy would keep him alive, and in which brandy was sure to kill him; — and it did kill him. Did you ever hear of the horrors of drink?”

“Yes; I have heard of such a state.”

“I hope you may never live to see it. It is a sight that would stick by you for ever. But I saw it, and tended him through the whole, as though I had

been his servant. I remained with him when that man who opened the door for you could no longer endure the room. I was with him when the strong woman from the hospital, though she could not understand his words, almost fainted at what she saw and heard. He was punished, Harry. I need wish no farther vengeance on him, even for all his cruelty, his injustice, his unmanly treachery. Is it not fearful to think that any man should have the power of bringing himself to such an end as that?"

Harry was thinking rather how fearful it was that a man should have it in his power to drag any woman through such a Gehenna as that which this lord had created. He felt that had Julia Brabazon been his, as she had once promised him, he never would have allowed himself to speak a harsh word to her, to have looked at her except with loving eyes. But she had chosen to join herself to a man who had treated her with a cruelty exceeding all that his imagination could have conceived. "It is a mercy that he has gone," said he at last.

"It is a mercy for both. Perhaps you can understand now something of my married life. And through it all I had but one friend; — if I may call him a friend who had come to terms with my husband, and was to have been his agent in destroying me. But when this man understood from me that I was not what he had been taught to think me, — which my husband had told him I was, — he relented."

"May I ask what was that man's name?"

"His name is Pateroff. He is a Pole, but he speaks English like an Englishman. In my presence he told Lord Ongar that he was false and brutal.

Lord Ongar laughed, with that little, low, sneering laughter which was his nearest approach to merriment, and told Count Pateroff that that was of course his game before me. There, Harry, — I will tell you nothing more of it. You will understand enough to know what I have suffered; and if you can believe that I have not sinned —”

“Oh, Lady Ongar!”

“Well, I will not doubt you again. But as far as I can learn you are nearly alone in your belief. What Hermy thinks I cannot tell, but she will soon come to think as Hugh may bid her. And I shall not blame her. What else can she do, poor creature?”

“I am sure she believes no ill of you.”

“I have one advantage, Harry, — one advantage over her and some others. I am free. The chains have hurt me sorely during my slavery; but I am free, and the price of my servitude remains. He had written home, — would you believe that? — while I was living with him he had written home to say that evidence should be collected for getting rid of me. And yet he would sometimes be civil, hoping to cheat me into inadvertencies. He would ask that man to dine, and then of a sudden would be absent; and during this he was ordering that evidence should be collected! Evidence, indeed! The same servants have lived with me through it all. If I could now bring forward evidence I could make it all clear s the day. But there needs no care for a woman’s honour, though a man may have to guard his by collecting evidence!”

“But what he did cannot injure you.”

“Yes, Harry, it has injured me; it has all but

destroyed me. Have not reports reached even you? Speak out like a man, and say whether it is not so?"

"I have heard something."

"Yes, you have heard something! If you heard something of your sister where would you be? All the world would be a chaos to you till you had pulled out somebody's tongue by the roots. Not injured me! For two years your cousin Hugh's house was my home. I met Lord Ongar in his house. I was married from his house. He is my brother-in-law, and it so happens that of all men he is the nearest to me. He stands well before the world, and at this time could have done me real service. How is it that he did not welcome me home; — that I am not now at his house with my sister; that he did not meet me so that the world might know that I was received back among my own people? Why is it, Harry, that I am telling this to you; — to you, who are nothing to me; my sister's husband's cousin; a young man, from your position not fit to be my confidant? Why am I telling this to you, Harry?"

"Because we are old friends," said he, wondering again at this moment whether she knew of his engagement with Florence Burton.

"Yes, we are old friends, and we have always liked each other; but you must know that, as the world judges, I am wrong to tell all this to you. I should be wrong, — only that the world has cast me out, so that I am no longer bound to regard it. I am Lady Ongar, and I have my share of that man's money. They have given me up Ongar Park, having satisfied themselves that it is mine by right, and must be mine by law. But he has robbed me of every

friend I had in the world, and yet you tell me he has not injured me!"

"Not every friend."

"No, Harry, I will not forget you, though I spoke so slightly of you just now. But your vanity need not be hurt. It is only the world, — Mrs. Grundy, you know, — that would deny me such friendship as yours; not my own taste or choice. Mrs. Grundy always denies us exactly those things which we ourselves like best. You are clever enough to understand that."

He smiled and looked foolish, and declared that he only offered his assistance because perhaps it might be convenient at the present moment. What could he do for her? How could he show his friendship for her now at once?

"You have done it, Harry, in listening to me and giving me your sympathy. It is seldom that we want any great thing from our friends. I want nothing of that kind. No one can hurt me much further now. My money and my rank are safe; and, perhaps, by degrees, acquaintances, if not friends, will form themselves round me again. At present, of course, I see no one; but because I see no one, I wanted some one to whom I could speak. Poor Hermy is worse than no one. Good-by, Harry; you look surprised and bewildered now, but you will soon get over that. Don't be long before I see you again."

Then feeling that he was bidden to go, he wished her good-by, and went.

CHAPTER VIII.

The House in Onslow Crescent.

HARRY, as he walked away from the house in Bolton Street, hardly knew whether he was on his heels or his head. Burton had told him not to dress — “We don’t give dress dinner parties, you know. It’s all in the family way with us,” — and Harry, therefore, went direct from Bolton Street to Onslow Crescent. But, though he managed to keep the proper course down Piccadilly, he was in such confusion of mind that he hardly knew whither he was going. It seemed as though a new form of life had been opened to him, and that it had been opened in such a way as almost necessarily to engulf him. It was not only that Lady Ongar’s history was so terrible, and her life so strange, but that he himself was called upon to form a part of that history, and to join himself in some sort to that life. This countess with her wealth, her rank, her beauty, and her bright intellect had called him to her, and told him that he was her only friend. Of course he had promised his friendship. How could he have failed to give such a promise to one whom he had loved so well? But to what must such a promise lead, or rather to what must it not have led had it not been for Florence Burton? She was young, free, and rich. She made no pretence of regret for the husband she had lost, speaking of him as though in truth she hardly regarded herself as his wife. And she was the same Julia whom he had loved, who had loved him, who had jilted him, and in regret for whom he had once resolved to lead a wretched, lonely life! Of course she must expect that he would renew it all; — unless,

indeed, she knew of his engagement. But if she knew it, why had she not spoken of it?

And could it be that she had no friends, — that everybody had deserted her, that she was all alone in the world? As he thought of it all, the whole thing seemed to him to be too terrible for reality. What a tragedy was that she had told him! He thought of the man's insolence to the woman whom he had married and sworn to love, then of his cruelty, his fiendish, hellish cruelty, — and lastly of his terrible punishment. "I stuck to him through it all," she had said to him; and then he endeavoured to picture to himself that bedside by which Julia Brabazon, his Julia Brabazon, had remained firm, when hospital attendants had been scared by the horrors they had witnessed, and the nerves of a strong man, — of a man paid for such work, — had failed him!

The truth of her word throughout he never doubted; and, indeed, no man or woman who heard her could have doubted. One hears stories told that to oneself, the hearer, are manifestly false; and one hears stories as to the truth or falsehood of which one is in doubt; and stories again which seem to be partly true and partly untrue. But one also hears that of the truth of which no doubt seems to be possible. So it had been with the tale which Lady Ongar had told. It had been all as she had said; and had Sir Hugh heard it, — even Sir Hugh, who doubted all men and regarded all women as being false beyond doubt, — even he, I think, would have believed it.

But she had deserved the sufferings which had come upon her. Even Harry, whose heart was very tender towards her, owned as much as that. She had

sold herself, as she had said of herself more than once. She had given herself to a man whom she regarded not at all, even when her heart belonged to another, — to a man whom she must have loathed and despised when she was putting her hand into his before the altar. What scorn had there been upon her face when she spoke of the beginning of their married miseries! With what eloquence of expression had she pronounced him to be vile, worthless, unmanly; a thing from which a woman must turn with speechless contempt! She had now his name, his rank, and his money, but she was friendless and alone. Harry Clavering declared to himself that she had deserved it, — and having so declared, forgave her all her faults. She had sinned, and then had suffered; and, therefore, should now be forgiven. If he could do aught to ease her troubles, he would do it, — as a brother would for a sister.

But it would be well that she should know of his engagement. Then he thought of the whole interview, and felt sure that she must know it. At any rate he told himself that he was sure. She could hardly have spoken to him as she had done, unless she had known. When last they had been together, sauntering round the gardens at Clavering, he had rebuked her for her treachery to him. Now she came to him almost open-armed, free, full of her cares, swearing to him that he was her only friend! All this could mean but one thing, — unless she knew that that one thing was barred by his altered position.

But it gratified him to think that she had chosen him for the repository of her tale; that she had told her terrible history to him. I fear that some small

part of this gratification was owing to her rank and wealth. To be the one friend of a widowed countess, young, rich, and beautiful, was something much out of the common way. Such confidence lifted him far above the Wallikers of the world. That he was pleased to be so trusted by one that was beautiful, was, I think, no disgrace to him; — although I bear in mind his condition as a man engaged. It might be dangerous, but that danger in such case it would be his duty to overcome. But in order that it might be overcome, it would certainly be well that she should know his position.

I fear he speculated as he went along as to what might have been his condition in the world had he never seen Florence Burton. First he asked himself, whether under any circumstances, he would have wished to marry a widow, and especially a widow by whom he had already been jilted. Yes; he thought that he could have forgiven her even that, if his own heart had not changed; but he did not forget to tell himself again how lucky it was for him that his heart was changed. What countess in the world, let her have what park she might, and any imaginable number of thousands a year, could be so sweet, so nice, so good, so fitting for him as his own Florence Burton? Then he endeavoured to reflect what happened when a commoner married the widow of a peer. She was still called, he believed, by her old title, unless she should choose to abandon it. Any such arrangement was now out of the question; but he thought that he would prefer that she should have been called Mrs. Clavering, if such a state of things had come about. I do not know that he pictured to himself any necessity, either on her

part or on his, of abandoning anything else that came to her from her late husband.

At half-past six, the time named by Theodore Burton, he found himself at the door in Onslow Crescent, and was at once shown up into the drawing-room. He knew that Mr. Burton had a family, and he had pictured to himself an untidy, ugly house, with an untidy, motherly woman going about with a baby in her arms. Such would naturally be the home of a man who dusted his shoes with his pocket-handkerchief. But to his surprise he found himself in as pretty a drawing-room as he remembered to have seen; and seated on a sofa, was almost as pretty a woman as he remembered. She was tall and slight, with large brown eyes and well-defined eyebrows, with an oval face, and the sweetest, kindest mouth that ever graced a woman. Her dark brown hair was quite plain, having been brushed simply smooth across the forehead, and then collected in a knot behind. Close beside her, on a low chair, sat a little fair-haired girl, about seven years old, who was going through some pretence at needlework; and kneeling on a higher chair, while she sprawled over the drawing-room table, was another girl, some three years younger, who was engaged with a puzzle-box.

"Mr. Clavering," said she, rising from her chair; "I am so glad to see you, though I am almost angry with you for not coming to us sooner. I have heard so much about you; of course you know that." Harry explained that he had only been a few days in town, and declared that he was happy to learn that he had been considered worth talking about.

"If you were worth accepting you were worth talking about."

"Perhaps I was neither," said he.

"Well; I am not going to flatter you yet. Only as I think our Flo is without exception the most perfect girl I ever saw, I don't suppose she would be guilty of making a bad choice. Cissy, dear, this is Mr. Clavering."

Cissy got up from her chair, and came up to him. "Mammy says I am to love you very much," said Cissy, putting up her face to be kissed.

"But I did not tell you to say I had told you," said Mrs. Burton, laughing.

"And I will love you very much," said Harry, taking her up in his arms.

"But not so much as Aunt Florence, — will you?"

They all knew it. It was clear to him that everybody connected with the Burtons had been told of the engagement, and that they all spoke of it openly, as they did of any other everyday family occurrence. There was not much reticence among the Burtons. He could not but feel this, though now, at the present moment, he was disposed to think specially well of the family because Mrs. Burton and her children were so nice.

"And this is another daughter?"

"Yes; another future niece, Mr. Clavering. But I suppose I may call you Harry; may I not? My name is Cecilia. Yes, that is Miss Pert."

"I'm not Miss Pert," said the little soft round ball of a girl from the chair. "I'm Sophy Burton. Oh! you musn't tittle."

Harry found himself quite at home in ten minutes; and before Mr. Burton had returned, had been taken upstairs into the nursery to see Theodore Burton Junior in his cradle, Theodore Burton Junior being as yet only some few months old. "Now you've seen us all," said Mrs. Burton, "and we'll go downstairs and wait for my husband. I must let you into a secret, too. We don't dine till past seven; you may as well remember that for the future. But I wanted to have you for half-an-hour to myself before dinner, so that I might look at you, and make up my mind about Flo's choice. I hope you won't be angry with me?"

"And how have you made up your mind?"

"If you want to find that out, you must get it through Florence. You may be quite sure I shall tell her; and, I suppose, I may be quite sure she will tell you. Does she tell you everything?"

"I tell her everything," said Harry, feeling himself, however, to be a little conscience-smitten at the moment, as he remembered his interview with Lady Ongar. Things had occurred this very day which he certainly could not tell her.

"Do; — do; always do that," said Mrs. Burton, laying her hand affectionately on his arm. "There is no way so certain to bind a woman to you, heart and soul, as to show her that you trust her in everything. Theodore tells me everything. I don't think there's a drain planned under a railway-bank, but that he shows it me in some way; and I feel so grateful for it. It makes me know that I can never do enough for him. I hope you'll be as good to Flo as he is to me."

"We can't both be perfect, you know."

"Ah, well! of course you'll laugh at me. Theodore always laughs at me when I get on what he calls a high horse. I wonder whether you are as sensible as he is?"

Harry reflected that he never wore cotton gloves. "I don't think I am very sensible," said he. "I do a great many foolish things, and the worst is, that I like them."

"So do I. I like so many foolish things!"

"Oh, mamma!" said Cissy.

"I shall have that quoted against me, now, for the next six months, whenever I am preaching wisdom in the nursery. But Florence is nearly as sensible as her brother."

"Much more so than I am."

"All the Burtons are full up to their eyes with good sense. And what a good thing it is! Who ever heard of any of them coming to sorrow? Whatever they have to live on, they always have enough. Did you ever know a woman who has done better with her children, or has known how to do better, than Theodore's mother? She is the dearest old woman!" Harry had heard her called a very clever old woman by certain persons in Stratton, and could not but think of her matrimonial successes as her praises were thus sung by her daughter-in-law.

They went on talking, while Sophy sat in Harry's lap, till there was heard the sound of the key in the latch of the front-door, and the master of the house was known to be there. "It's Theodore," said his wife, jumping up and going out to meet him. "I'm so glad that you have been here a little before him,

because now I feel that I know you. When he's here I shan't get in a word." Then she went down to her husband, and Harry was left to speculate how so very charming a woman could ever have been brought to love a man who cleaned his boots with his pocket-handkerchief.

There were soon steps again upon the stairs, and Burton returned bringing with him another man whom he introduced to Harry as Mr. Jones. "I didn't know my brother was coming," said Mrs. Burton, "but it will be very pleasant, as of course I shall want you to know him." Harry became a little perplexed. How far might these family ramifications be supposed to go? Would he be welcomed, as one of the household, to the hearth of Mrs. Jones; and if of Mrs. Jones, then of Mrs. Jones's brother? His mental inquiries, however, in this direction, were soon ended by his finding that Mr. Jones was a bachelor.

Jones, it appeared, was the editor, or sub-editor, or co-editor, of some influential daily newspaper. "He is a night bird, Harry —," said Mrs. Burton. She had fallen into the way of calling him Harry at once, but he could not on that occasion bring himself to call her Cecilia. He might have done so had not her husband been present, but he was ashamed to do it before him. "He is a night bird, Harry," said she, speaking of her brother, "and flies away at nine o'clock, that he may go and hoot like an owl in some dark city haunt that he has. Then, when he is himself asleep at breakfast-time, his hootings are being heard round the town."

Harry rather liked the idea of knowing an editor. Editors were, he thought, influential people, who had the world very much under their feet, — being, as he

conceived, afraid of no men, while other men are very much afraid of them. He was glad enough to shake Jones by the hand, when he found that Jones was an editor. But Jones, though he had the face and forehead of a clever man, was very quiet, and seemed almost submissive to his sister and brother-in-law.

The dinner was plain, but good, and Harry after a while became happy and satisfied, although he had come to the house with something almost like a resolution to find fault. Men, and women also, do frequently go about in such a mood, having unconscionably, from some small circumstance, prejudged their acquaintances, and made up their mind that their acquaintances should be condemned. Influenced in this way, Harry had not intended to pass a pleasant evening, and would have stood aloof and been cold, had it been possible to him; but he found that it was not possible; and after a little while he was friendly and joyous, and the dinner went off very well. There was some wild-fowl, and he was agreeably surprised as he watched the mental anxiety and gastronomic skill with which Burton went through the process of preparing the gravy, with lemon and pepper, having in the room a little silver-pot and an apparatus of fire for the occasion. He would as soon have expected the Archbishop of Canterbury himself to go through such an operation in the dining-room at Lambeth as the hard-working man of business whom he had known in the chambers at the Adelphi.

"Does he always do that, Mrs. Burton?" Harry asked.

"Always," said Burton, "when I can get the materials. One doesn't bother oneself about a cold leg of mutton, you know, which is my usual dinner when

we are alone. The children have it hot in the middle of the day."

"Such a thing never happened to him yet, Harry," said Mrs. Burton.

"Gently with the pepper," said the editor. It was the first word he had spoken for some time.

"Be good enough to remember that, yourself, when you are writing your article to-night."

"No, none for me, Theodore," said Mrs. Burton.

"Cissy!"

"I have dined, really. If I had remembered that you were going to display your cookery, I would have kept some of my energy, but I forgot it."

"As a rule," said Burton, "I don't think women recognize any difference in flavours. I believe wild duck and hashed mutton would be quite the same to my wife if her eyes were blinded. I should not mind this, if it were not that they are generally proud of the deficiency. They think it grand."

"Just as men think it grand not to know one tune from another," said his wife.

When dinner was over, Burton got up from his seat. "Harry," said he, "do you like good wine?" Harry said that he did. Whatever women may say about wild-fowl, men never profess an indifference to good wine, although there is a theory about the world, quite as incorrect as it is general, that they have given up drinking it. "Indeed, I do," said Harry. "Then I'll give you a bottle of port," said Burton, and so saying he left the room.

"I'm very glad you have come to-day," said Jones, with much gravity. "He never gives me any of that

when I'm alone with him; and he never, by any means, brings it out for company."

"You don't mean to accuse him of drinking it alone, Tom?" said his sister, laughing.

"I don't know when he drinks; I only know when he doesn't."

The wine was decanted with as much care as had been given to the concoction of the gravy, and the clearness of the dark liquid was scrutinized with an eye that was full of anxious care. "Now, Cissy, what do you think of that? She knows a glass of good wine when she gets it, as well as you do, Harry; in spite of her contempt for the duck."

As they sipped the old port they sat round the dining-room fire, and Harry Clavering was forced to own to himself that he had never been more comfortable.

"Ah," said Burton, stretching out his slippered feet, "why can't it all be after-dinner, instead of that weary room at the Adelphi?"

"And all old port?" said Jones.

"Yes, and all old port. You are not such an ass as to suppose that a man in suggesting to himself a continuance of pleasure suggests to himself also the evils which are supposed to accompany such pleasure. If I took much of the stuff I should get cross and sick, and make a beast of myself; but then what a pity it is that it should be so."

"You wouldn't like much of it, I think," said his wife.

"That is it," said he. "We are driven to work because work never palls on us, whereas pleasure always does. What a wonderful scheme it is when one

looks at it all. No man can follow pleasure long continually. When a man strives to do so, he turns his pleasure at once into business, and works at that. Come, Harry, we mustn't have another bottle, as Jones would go to sleep among the type." Then they all went upstairs together. Harry, before he went away, was taken again up into the nursery, and there kissed the two little girls in their cots. When he was outside the nursery door, on the top of the stairs, Mrs. Burton took him by the hand. "You'll come to us often," said she, "and make yourself at home here, will you not?" Harry could not but say that he would. Indeed he did so without hesitation, almost with eagerness, for he had liked her and had liked her house. "We think of you, you know," she continued, "quite as one of ourselves. How could it be otherwise when Flo is the dearest to us of all beyond our own?"

"It makes me so happy to hear you say so," said he.

"Then come here and talk about her. I want Theodore to feel that you are his brother; it will be so important to you in the business that it should be so." After that he went away, and as he walked back along Piccadilly, and then up through the regions of St. Giles to his home in Bloomsbury Square, he satisfied himself that the life of Onslow Crescent was a better manner of life than was likely to prevail in Bolton Street.

When he was gone his character was of course discussed between the husband and wife in Onslow Crescent. "What do you think of him?" said the husband.

"I like him so much! He is so much nicer than

you told me, — so much pleasanter and easier; and I have no doubt he is as clever, though I don't think he shows that at once."

"He is clever enough; there's no doubt about that."

"And did you not think he was pleasant?"

"Yes; he was pleasant here. He is one of those men who get on best with women. You'll make much more of him for awhile than I shall. He'll gossip with you and sit idling with you for the hour together, if you'll let him. There's nothing wrong about him, and he'd like nothing better than that."

"You don't believe that he's idle by disposition? Think of all that he has done already."

"That's just what is most against him. He might do very well with us if he had not got that confounded fellowship; but having got that, he thinks the hard work of life is pretty well over with him."

"I don't suppose he can be so foolish as that, Theodore."

"I know well what such men are, and I know the evil that is done to them by the cramming they endure. They learn many names of things, — high-sounding names, and they come to understand a great deal about words. It is a knowledge that requires no experience and very little real thought. But it demands much memory; and when they have loaded themselves in this way, they think that they are instructed in all things. After all, what can they do that is of real use to mankind? What can they create?"

"I suppose they are of use."

"I don't know it. A man will tell you, or pre-

tend to tell you, — for the chances are ten to one that he is wrong, — what sort of lingo was spoken in some particular island or province six hundred years before Christ. What good will that do any one, even if he were right? And then see the effect upon the men themselves. At four-and-twenty a young fellow has achieved some wonderful success, and calls himself by some outlandish and conceited name — a ‘double first,’ or something of the kind. Then he thinks he has completed everything, and is too vain to learn anything afterwards. The truth is, that at twenty-four no man has done more than acquire the rudiments of his education. The system is bad from beginning to end. All that competition makes false and imperfect growth. Come, I’ll go to bed.”

What would Harry have said if he had heard all this from the man who dusted his boots with his handkerchief?

CHAPTER IX.

Too Prudent by Half.

FLORENCE BURTON thought herself the happiest girl in the world. There was nothing wanting to the perfection of her bliss. She could perceive, though she never allowed her mind to dwell upon the fact, that her lover was superior in many respects to the men whom her sisters had married. He was better educated, better looking, in fact more fully a gentleman at all points, than either Scarness or any of the others. She liked her sisters’ husbands very well, and in former days, before Harry Clavering had come to Stratton, she had never taught herself to think that she, if she

married, would want anything different from that which Providence had given to them. She had never thrown up her head, or even thrown up her nose, and told herself that she would demand something better than that. But not the less was she alive to the knowledge that something better had come in her way, and that that something better was now her own. She was very proud of her lover, and no doubt, in some gently feminine way showed that she was so as she made her way about among her friends at Stratton. Any idea that she herself was better educated, better looking, or more clever than her elder sisters, and that, therefore, she was deserving of a higher order of husband, had never entered her mind. The Burtons in London, — Theodore Burton and his wife, — who knew her well, and who, of all the family, were best able to appreciate her worth, had long been of opinion that she deserved some specially favoured lot in life. The question with them would be, whether Harry Clavering was good enough for her.

Everybody at Stratton knew that she was engaged, and when they wished her joy she made no coy denials. Her sisters had all been engaged in the same way, and their marriages had gone off in regular sequence to their engagements. There had never been any secret with them about their affairs. On this matter the practice is very various among different people. There are families who think it almost indelicate to talk about marriage, as a thing actually in prospect for any of their own community. An ordinary acquaintance would be considered to be impertinent in even hinting at such a thing, although the thing were an established fact. The engaged young ladies only

whisper the news through the very depths of their pink note-paper, and are supposed to blush as they communicate the tidings by their pens, even in the retirement of their own rooms. But there are other families in which there is no vestige of such mystery, in which an engaged couple are spoken of together as openly as though they were already bound in some sort of public partnership. In these families the young ladies talk openly of their lovers, and generally prefer that subject of conversation to any other. Such a family, — so little mysterious, — so open in their arrangements, was that of the Burtons at Stratton. The reserve in the reserved families is usually atoned for by the magnificence of the bridal arrangements when the marriage is at last solemnized; whereas, among the other set, — the people who have no reserve, — the marriage when it comes, is customarily an affair of much less outward ceremony. They are married without blast of trumpet, with very little profit to the confectioner, and do their honeymoon, if they do it at all, with prosaic simplicity.

Florence had made up her mind that she would be in no hurry about it. Harry was in a hurry; but that was a matter of course. He was a quick-blooded, impatient, restless being. She was slower, and more given to consideration. It would be better that they should wait, even if it were for five or six years. She had no fear of poverty for herself. She had lived always in a house in which money was much regarded, and among people who were of inexpensive habits. But such had not been his lot, and it was her duty to think of the mode of life which might suit him. He would not be happy as a poor man, — without com-

forts around him, which would simply be comforts to him though they would be luxuries to her. When her mother told her, shaking her head rather sorrowfully as she heard Florence talk, that she did not like long engagements, Florence would shake hers too, in playful derision, and tell her mother not to be so suspicious. "It is not you that are going to marry him, mamma."

"No, my dear; I know that. But long engagements never are good. And I can't think why young people should want so many things, now, that they used to do without very well when I was married. When I went into housekeeping, we only had one girl of fifteen to do everything; and we hadn't a nursemaid regular till Theodore was born; and there were three before him."

Florence could not say how many maid-servants Harry might wish to have under similar circumstances, but she was very confident that he would want much more attendance than her father and mother had done, or even than some of her brothers and sisters. Her father, when he first married, would not have objected, on returning home, to find his wife in the kitchen, looking after the progress of the dinner; nor even would her brother Theodore have been made unhappy by such a circumstance. But Harry, she knew, would not like it; and therefore Harry must wait. "It will do him good, mamma," said Florence. "You can't think that I mean to find fault with him; but I know that he is young in his ways. He is one of those men who should not marry till they are twenty-eight, or thereabouts."

"You mean that he is unsteady?"

"No, — not unsteady. I don't think him a bit

unsteady; but he will be happier single for a year or two. He hasn't settled down to like his tea and toast when he is tired of his work, as a married man should do. Do you know that I am not sure that a little flirtation would not be very good for him?"

"Oh, my dear."

"It should be very moderate, you know."

"But then, suppose it wasn't moderate. I don't like to see engaged young men going on in that way. I suppose I'm very old-fashioned; but I think when a young man is engaged, he ought to remember it and to show it. It ought to make him a little serious, and he shouldn't be going about like a butterfly, that may do just as it pleases in the sunshine."

During the three months which Henry remained in town before the Easter holidays he wrote more than once to Florence, pressing her to name an early day for their marriage. These letters were written, I think, after certain evenings spent under favourable circumstances in Onslow Crescent, when he was full of the merits of domestic comfort, and perhaps also owed some of their inspiration to the fact that Lady Ongar had left London without seeing him. He had called repeatedly in Bolton Street, having been specially pressed to do so by Lady Ongar, but he had only once found her at home, and then a third person had been present. This third person had been a lady who was not introduced to him, but he had learned from her speech that she was a foreigner. On that occasion Lady Ongar had made herself gracious and pleasant, but nothing had passed which interested him, and, most unreasonably, he had felt himself to be provoked. When next he went to Bolton Street he found that

Lady Ongar had left London. She had gone down to Ongar Park, and, as far as the woman at the house knew, intended to remain there till after Easter. Harry had some undefined idea that she should not have taken such a step without telling him. Had she not declared to him that he was her only friend? When a friend is going out of town, leaving an only friend behind, that friend ought to tell her only friend what she is going to do, otherwise such a declaration of only-friendship means nothing. Such was Harry Clavering's reasoning, and having so reasoned, he declared to himself that it did mean nothing, and was very pressing to Florence Burton to name an early day. He had been with Cecilia, he told her, — he had learned to call Mrs. Burton Cecilia in his letters, — and she quite agreed with him that their income would be enough. He was to have two hundred a year from his father, having brought himself to abandon that high-toned resolve which he had made some time since that he would never draw any part of his income from the parental coffers. His father had again offered it, and he had accepted it. Old Mr. Burton was to add a hundred, and Harry was of opinion that they could do very well. Cecilia thought the same, he said, and therefore Florence surely would not refuse. But Florence received, direct from Onslow Crescent, Cecilia's own version of her thoughts, and did refuse. It may be surmised that she would have refused even without assistance from Cecilia, for she was a young lady not of a fickle or changing disposition. So she wrote to Harry with much care, and as her letter had some influence on the story to be told, the reader shall read it, — if the reader so pleases.

Stratton. March, 186—.

DEAR HARRY, —

I RECEIVED your letter this morning, and answer it at once, because I know you will be impatient for an answer. You are impatient about things, — are you not? But it was a kind, sweet, dear, generous letter, and I need not tell you now that I love the writer of it with all my heart. I am so glad you like Cecilia. I think she is the perfection of a woman. And Theodore is every bit as good as Cecilia, though I know you don't think so, because you don't say so. I am always happy when I am in Onslow Crescent. I should have been there this spring, only that a certain person who chooses to think that his claims on me are stronger than those of any other person wishes me to go elsewhere. Mamma wishes me to go to London also for a week, but I don't want to be away from the old house too much before the final parting comes at last.

And now about the final parting; for I may as well rush at it at once. I need hardly tell you that no care for father or mother shall make me put off my marriage. Of course I owe everything to you now; and as they have approved it, I have no right to think of them in opposition to you. And you must not suppose that they ask me to stay. On the contrary, mamma is always telling me that early marriages are best. She has sent all the birds out of the nest but one; and is impatient to see that one fly away, that she may be sure that there is no lame one in the brood. You must not therefore think that it is mamma; nor is it papa, as regards himself, — though papa agrees with me in thinking that we ought to wait a little.

Dear Harry, you must not be angry, but I am sure that we ought to wait. We are, both of us, young, and why should we be in a hurry? I know what you will say, and of course I love you the more because you love me so well; but I fancy that I can be quite happy if I can see you two or three times in the year, and hear from you constantly. It is so good of you to write such nice letters, and the longer they are the better I like them. Whatever you put in them, I like them to be full. I know I can't write nice letters myself, and it makes me unhappy. Unless I have got something special to say, I am dumb.

But now I have something special to say. In spite of all that you tell me about Cecilia, I do not think it would do for us to venture upon marrying yet. I know that you are willing to sacrifice everything, but I ought not on that account to accept a sacrifice. I could not bear to see you poor and uncomfortable; and we should be very poor in London now-a-days with such an income as we should have. If we were going to live here at Stratton perhaps we might manage, but I feel sure that it would be imprudent in London. You ought not to be angry with me for saying this, for I am quite as anxious to be with you as you can possibly be to be with me; only I can bear to look forward, and have a pleasure in feeling that all my happiness is to come. I know I am right in this. Do write me one little line to say that you are not angry with your little girl.

I shall be quite ready for you by the 29th. I got such a dear little note

from Fanny the other day. She says that you never write to them, and she supposes that I have the advantage of all your energy in that way. I have told her that I do get a good deal. My brother writes to me very seldom I know; and I get twenty letters from Cecilia for one scrap that Theodore ever sends me. Perhaps some of these days I shall be the chief correspondent with the rectory. Fanny told me all about the dresses, and I have my own quite ready. I've been bridesmaid to four of my own sisters, so I ought to know what I'm about. I'll never be bridesmaid to anybody again, after Fanny; but whom on earth shall I have for myself? I think we must wait till Cissy and Sophy are ready. Cissy wrote me word that you were a darling man. I don't know how much of that came directly from Cissy, or how much from Cecilia.

God bless you, dear, dearest Harry. Let me have one letter before you come to fetch me, and acknowledge that I am right, even if you say that I am disagreeable. Of course I like to think that you want to have me; but, you see, one has to pay the penalty of being civilized. — Ever and always your own affectionate

FLORENCE BURTON.

Harry Clavering was very angry when he got this letter. The primary cause of his anger was the fact that Florence should pretend to know what was better for him than he knew himself. If he was willing to encounter life in London on less than four hundred a year, surely she might be contented to try the same experiment. He did not for a moment suspect that she feared for herself, but he was indignant with her because of her fear for him. What right had she to accuse him of wanting to be comfortable? Had he not for her sake consented to be very uncomfortable at that old house at Stratton? Was he not willing to give up his fellowship, and the society of Lady Ongar, and everything else, for her sake? Had he not shown himself to be such a lover as there is not one in a hundred? And yet she wrote and told him that it wouldn't do for him to be poor and uncomfortable! After all that he had done in the world, after all that he had gone through, it would be odd if, at this time

of day, he did not know what was good for himself! It was in that way that he regarded Florence's pertinacity.

He was rather unhappy at this period. It seemed to him that he was somewhat slighted on both sides, — or, if I may say so, less thought of on both sides than he deserved. Had Lady Ongar remained in town, as she ought to have done, he would have solaced himself, and at the same time have revenged himself upon Florence, by devoting some of his spare hours to that lady. It was Lady Ongar's sudden departure that had made him feel that he ought to rush at once into marriage. Now he had no consolation, except that of complaining to Mrs. Burton, and going frequently to the theatre. To Mrs. Burton he did complain a great deal, pulling her worsteds and threads about the while, sitting in idleness while she was working, just as Theodore Burton had predicted that he would do.

"I won't have you so idle, Harry," Mrs. Burton said to him one day. "You know you ought to be at your office now." It must be admitted on behalf of Harry Clavering, that they who liked him, especially women, were able to become intimate with him very easily. He had comfortable, homely ways about him, and did not habitually give himself airs. He had become quite domesticated at the Burtons' house during the ten weeks that he had been in London, and knew his way to Onslow Crescent almost too well. It may, perhaps, be surmised correctly that he would not have gone there so frequently if Mrs. Theodore Burton had been an ugly woman.

"It's all her fault," said he, continuing to snip a

piece of worsted with a pair of scissors as he spoke. "She's too prudent by half."

"Poor Florence!"

"You can't but know that I should work three times as much if she had given me a different answer. It stands to reason any man would work under such circumstances as that. Not that I am idle. I believe I do as much as any other man about the place."

"I won't have my worsted destroyed, all the same. Theodore says that Florence is right."

"Of course he does; of course he'll say I'm wrong. I won't ask her again, — that's all."

"Oh, Harry! don't say that. You know you'll ask her. You would to-morrow, if she were here."

"You don't know me, Cecilia, or you would not say so. When I have made up my mind to a thing, I am generally firm about it. She said something about two years, and I will not say a word to alter that decision. If it be altered, it shall be altered by her."

In the meantime he punished Florence by sending her no special answer to her letter. He wrote to her as usual; but he made no reference to his last proposal, nor to her refusal. She had asked him to tell her that he was not angry, but he would tell her nothing of the kind. He told her when and where and how he would meet her, and convey her from Stratton to Clavering; gave her some account of a play he had seen; described a little dinner-party in Onslow Crescent; and told her a funny story about Mr. Walliker and the office at the Adelphi. But he said no word, even in rebuke, as to her decision about their marriage. He intended that this should be felt

to be severe, and took pleasure in the pain that he would be giving. Florence, when she received her letter, knew that he was sore, and understood thoroughly the working of his mind. "I will comfort him when we are together," she said to herself. "I will make him reasonable when I see him." It was not the way in which he expected that his anger would be received.

One day on his return home he found a card on his table which surprised him very much. It contained a name but no address, but over the name there was a pencil memorandum, stating that the owner of the card would call again on his return to London after Easter. The name on the card was that of Count Pateroff. He remembered the name well as soon as he saw it, though he had never thought of it since the solitary occasion on which it had been mentioned to him. Count Pateroff was the man who had been Lord Ongar's friend, and respecting whom Lord Ongar had brought a false charge against his wife. Why should Count Pateroff call on him? Why was he in England? Whence had he learned the address in Bloomsbury Square? To that last question he had no difficulty in finding an answer. Of course he must have heard it from Lady Ongar. Count Pateroff had now left London! Had he gone to Ongar Park? Harry Clavering's mind was instantly filled with suspicion, and he became jealous in spite of Florence Burton. Could it be that Lady Ongar, not yet four months a widow, was receiving at her house in the country this man with whose name her own had been so fatally joined? If so, what could he think of such behaviour? He was very angry. He knew that he was angry, but he

did not at all know that he was jealous. Was he not, by her own declaration to him, her only friend; and as such could he entertain such a suspicion without anger? "Her friend!" he said to himself. "Not if she has any dealings whatever with that man after what she has told me of him!" He remembered at last that perhaps the count might not be at Ongar Park; but he must, at any rate, have had some dealing with Lady Ongar, or he would not have known the address in Bloomsbury Square. "Count Pateroff!" he said, repeating the name, "I shouldn't wonder if I have to quarrel with that man." During the whole of that night he was thinking of Lady Ongar. As regarded himself, he knew that he had nothing to offer to Lady Ongar but a brotherly friendship; but, nevertheless, it was an injury to him that she should be acquainted intimately with any unmarried man but himself.

On the next day he was to go to Stratton, and in the morning a letter was brought to him by the postman; a letter, or rather a very short note. Guildford was the postmark, and he knew at once that it was from Lady Ongar.

DEAR MR. CLAVERING (the note said), —

I WAS so sorry to leave London without seeing you; I shall be back by the end of April, and am keeping on the same rooms. Come to me, if you can, on the evening of the 30th, after dinner. He at last bade Hermy to write and ask me to go to Clavering for the Easter week. Such a note! I'll show it you when we meet. Of course I declined.

But I write on purpose to tell you that I have begged Count Pateroff to see you. I have not seen him, but I have had to write to him about things that happened in Florence. He has come to England chiefly with reference to the affairs of Lord Ongar. I want you to hear his story. As far as I have known him he is a truth-telling man, though I do not know that I am able to say much more in his favour.

Ever yours, J. O.

When he had read this he was quite an altered man. See Count Pateroff! Of course he would see him. What task could be more fitting for a friend than this, of seeing such a man under such circumstances. Before he left London he wrote a note for Count Pateroff, to be given to the count by the people at the lodgings should he call during Harry's absence from London. In this he explained that he would be at Clavering for a fortnight, but expressed himself ready to come up to London at a day's notice should Count Pateroff be necessitated again to leave London before the day named.

As he went about his business that day, and as he journeyed down to Stratton, he entertained much kinder ideas about Lady Ongar than he had previously done since seeing Count Pateroff's card.

CHAPTER X.

Florence Burton at the Rectory.

HARRY CLAVERING went down to Stratton, slept one night at old Mr. Burton's house, and drove Florence over to Clavering, — twenty miles across the country, — on the following day. This journey together had been looked forward to with great delight by both of them, and Florence, in spite of the snubbing which she had received from her lover because of her prudence, was very happy as she seated herself alongside of him in the vehicle which had been sent over from the rectory, and which he called a trap. Not a word had as yet been said between them as to that snubbing, nor was Harry minded that anything should be said. He meant to carry on his revenge by being dumb on that subject.

But such was not Florence's intention. She desired not only to have her own way in this matter, but desired also that he should assent to her arrangements.

It was a charming day for such a journey. It was cold, but not cold enough to make them uncomfortable. There was a wind, but not wind enough to torment them. Once there came on a little shower, which just sufficed to give Harry an opportunity of wrapping his companion very closely, but he had hardly completed the ceremony before the necessity for it was over. They both agreed that this mode of travelling was infinitely preferable to a journey by railroad, and I myself should be of the same opinion if one could always make one's journeys under the same circumstances. And it must be understood that Harry, though no doubt he was still taking his revenge on Florence by abstaining from all allusion to her letter, was not disposed to make himself otherwise disagreeable. He played his part of lover very well, and Florence was supremely happy.

"Harry," she said, when the journey was more than half completed, "you never told me what you thought of my letter."

"Which letter?" But he knew very well which was the letter in question.

"My prudent letter, — written in answer to yours that was very imprudent."

"I thought there was nothing more to be said about it."

"Come, Harry, don't let there be any subject between us that we don't care to think about and discuss. I know what you meant by not answering me. You meant to punish me, did you not, for having

an opinion different from yours? Is not that true, Harry?"

"Punish you, — no; I did not want to punish you. It was I that was punished, I think."

"But you know I was right. Was I not right?"

"I think you were wrong, but I don't want to say anything more about it now."

"Ah, but, Harry, I want you to talk about it. Is it not everything to me, — everything in this world, — that you and I should agree about this! I have nothing else to think of but you. I have nothing to hope for but that I may live to be your wife. My only care in the world is my care for you! Come, Harry, don't be glum with me."

"I am not glum."

"Speak a nice word to me. Tell me that you believe me when I say that it is not of myself I am thinking, but of you."

"Why can't you let me think for myself in this?"

"Because you have got to think for me."

"And I think you'd do very well on the income we've got. If you'll consent to marry, this summer, I won't be glum, as you call it, a moment longer."

"No, Harry; I must not do that. I should be false to my duty to you if I did."

"Then it's no use saying anything more about it."

"Look here, Harry, if an engagement for two years is tedious to you ——"

"Of course it is tedious. Is not waiting for anything always tedious? There's nothing I hate so much as waiting."

"But listen to me," said she, gravely. "If it is too tedious, if it is more than you think you can bear

without being unhappy, I will release you from your engagement."

"Florence!"

"Hear me to the end. It will make no change in me; and then if you like to come to me again at the end of the two years, you may be sure of the way in which I shall receive you."

"And what good would that do?"

"Simply this good, that you would not be bound in a manner that makes you unhappy. If you did not intend that when you asked me to be your wife —— Oh, Harry, all I want is to make you happy. That is all that I care for, all that I think about!"

Harry swore to her with ten thousand oaths that he would not release her from any part of her engagement with him, that he would give her no loophole of escape from him, that he intended to hold her so firmly that if she divided herself from him, she should be accounted among women a paragon of falseness. He was ready, he said, to marry her to-morrow. That was his wish, his idea of what would be best for both of them; — and after that, if not to-morrow, then on the next day, and so on till the day should come on which she should consent to become his wife. He went on also to say that he should continue to torment her on the subject about once a week till he had induced her to give way; and then he quoted a Latin line to show that a constant dropping of water will hollow a stone. This was somewhat at variance with a declaration he had made to Mrs. Burton, in Onslow Crescent, to the effect that he would never speak to Florence again upon the subject; but then men do

occasionally change their minds, and Harry Clavering was a man who often changed his.

Florence, as he made the declaration above described, thought that he played his part of lover very well, and drew herself a little closer to him as she thanked him for his warmth. "Dear Harry, you are so good and so kind, and I do love you so truly!" In this way the journey was made very pleasantly, and when Florence was driven up to the rectory door she was quite contented with her coachman.

Harry Clavering, who is the hero of our story, will not, I fear, have hitherto presented himself to the reader as having much of the heroic nature in his character. It will, perhaps, be complained of him that he is fickle, vain, easily led, and almost as easily led to evil as to good. But it should be remembered that hitherto he has been rather hardly dealt with in these pages, and that his faults and weaknesses have been exposed almost unfairly. That he had such faults and was subject to such weaknesses may be believed of him; but there may be a question whether as much evil would not be known of most men, let them be heroes or not be heroes, if their characters were, so to say, turned inside out before our eyes. Harry Clavering, fellow of his college, six feet high, with handsome face and person, and with plenty to say for himself on all subjects, was esteemed highly and regarded much by those who knew him, in spite of those little foibles which marred his character; and I must beg the reader to take the world's opinion about him, and not to estimate him too meanly thus early in this history of his adventures.

If this tale should ever be read by any lady who,

in the course of her career, has entered a house under circumstances similar to those which had brought Florence Burton to Clavering rectory, she will understand how anxious must have been that young lady when she encountered the whole Clavering family in the hall. She had been blown about by the wind, and her cloaks and shawls were heavy on her, and her hat was a little out of shape, — from some fault on the part of Harry, as I believe, — and she felt herself to be a dowdy as she appeared among them. What would they think of her, and what would they think of Harry in that he had chosen such an one to be his wife? Mrs. Clavering had kissed her before she had seen that lady's face; and Mary and Fanny had kissed her before she knew which was which; and then a stout, clerical gentleman kissed her who, no doubt, was Mr. Clavering, senior. After that, another clerical gentleman, very much younger and very much slighter, shook hands with her. He might have kissed her, too, had he been so minded, for Florence was too confused to be capable of making any exact reckoning in the matter. He might have done so — that is, as far as Florence was concerned. It may be a question whether Mary Clavering would not have objected; for this clerical gentleman was the Rev. Edward Fielding, who was to become her husband in three days' time.

"Now, Florence," said Fanny, "come upstairs into mamma's room and have some tea, and we'll look at you. Harry, you needn't come. You've had her to yourself for a long time, and can have her again in the evening."

Florence, in this way, was taken upstairs and found herself seated by a fire, while three pairs of hands

were taking from her her shawls and hat and cloak, almost before she knew where she was.

"It is so odd to have you here," said Fanny. "We have only one brother, so, of course, we shall make very much of you. Isn't she nice, mamma?"

"I'm sure she is; very nice. But I shouldn't have told her so before her face, if you hadn't asked the question."

"That's nonsense, mamma. You mustn't believe mamma when she pretends to be grand and sententious. It's only put on as a sort of company air, but we don't mean to make company of you."

"Pray don't," said Florence.

"I'm so glad you are come just at this time," said Mary. "I think so much of having Harry's future wife at my wedding. I wish we were both going to be married the same day."

"But we are not going to be married for ever so long. Two years hence has been the shortest time named."

"Don't be sure of that, Florence," said Fanny. "We have all of us received a special commission from Harry to talk you out of that heresy; have we not, mamma?"

"I think you had better not tease Florence about that immediately on her arrival. It's hardly fair." Then, when they had drunk their tea, Florence was taken away to her own room, and before she was allowed to go downstairs she was intimate with both the girls, and had so far overcome her awe of Harry's mother as to be able to answer her without confusion.

"Well, sir, what do you think of her?" said Harry to his father, as soon as they were alone.

"I have not had time to think much of her yet. She seems to be very pretty. She isn't so tall as I thought she would be."

"No; she's not tall," said Harry, in a voice of disappointment.

"I've no doubt we shall like her very much. What money is she to have?"

"A hundred a year while her father lives."

"That's not much."

"Much or little, it made no difference with me. I should never have thought of marrying a girl for her money. It's a kind of thing that I hate. I almost wish she was to have nothing."

"I shouldn't refuse it if I were you."

"Of course, I shan't refuse it; but what I mean is that I never thought about it when I asked her to have me; and I shouldn't have been a bit more likely to ask her if she had ten times as much."

"A fortune with one's wife isn't a bad thing for a poor man, Harry."

"But a poor man must be poor in more senses than one when he looks about to get a fortune in that way."

"I suppose you won't marry just yet," said the father. "Including everything, you would not have five hundred a year, and that would be very close work in London."

"It's not quite decided yet, sir. As far as I am myself concerned, I think that people are a great deal too prudent about money. I believe I could live as a married man on a hundred a year, if I had no more; and as for London, I don't see why London should be more expensive than any other place. You can get

exactly what you want in London, and make your halfpence go farther there than anywhere else."

"And your sovereigns go quicker," said the rector.

"All that is wanted," said Harry, "is the will to live on your income, and a little firmness in carrying out your plans."

The rector of Clavering, as he heard all this wisdom fall from his son's lips, looked at Harry's expensive clothes, at the ring on his finger, at the gold chain on his waistcoat, at the studs in his shirt, and smiled gently. He was by no means so clever a man as his son, but he knew something more of the world, and though not much given to general reading, he had read his son's character. "A great deal of firmness and of fortitude also is wanted for that kind of life," he said. "There are men who can go through it without suffering, but I would not advise any young man to commence it in a hurry. If I were you I should wait a year or two. Come, let's have a walk; that is, if you can tear yourself away from your lady-love for an hour. If there is not Saul coming up the avenue! Take your hat, Harry, and we'll get out the other way. He only wants to see the girls about the school, but if he catches us he'll keep us for an hour." Then Harry asked after Mr. Saul's love-affairs. "I've not heard one single word about it since you went away," said the rector. "It seems to have passed off like a dream. He and Fanny go on the same as ever, and I suppose he knows that he made a fool of himself." But in this matter the rector of Clavering was mistaken. Mr. Saul did not by any means think that he had made a fool of himself.

"He has never spoken a word to me since," said

Fanny to her brother that evening; "that is, not a word as to what occurred then. Of course it was very embarrassing at first, though I don't think he minded it much. He came after a day or two just the same as ever, and he almost made me think that he had forgotten it."

"And he wasn't confused?"

"Not at all. He never is. The only difference is that I think he scolds me more than he used to do."

"Scold you!"

"Oh dear, yes; he always scolded me if he thought there was anything wrong, especially about giving the children holidays. But he does it now more than ever."

"And how do you bear it?"

"In a half-and-half sort of way. I laugh at him, and then do as I'm bid. He makes everybody do what he bids them at Clavering, — except papa, sometimes. But he scolds him, too. I heard him the other day in the library."

"And did my father take it from him?"

"He did in a sort of a way. I don't think papa likes him; but then he knows, and we all know, that he is so good. He never spares himself in anything. He has nothing but his curacy, and what he gives away is wonderful."

"I hope he won't take to scolding me," said Harry, proudly.

"As you don't concern yourself about the parish, I should say that you're safe. I suppose he thinks mamma does everything right, for he never scolds her."

"There is no talk of his going away."

"None at all. I think we should all be a cause he does so much good."

Florence reigned supreme in the estimation of the rectory family all the evening of her arrival and after breakfast the next morning, but then the brilliant elect was restored to her natural pre-eminence. This, however, lasted only for two days, after which the bride was taken away. The wedding was very nice, and pretty, and comfortable; and the people of Clavering were much better satisfied with it than they had been with that other marriage which has been mentioned as having been celebrated in Clavering Church. The rectory family was generally popular, and everybody wished well to the daughter who was being given away. When they were gone, there was a breakfast at the rectory, and speeches were made with much volubility. On such an occasion the rector was a great man, and Harry also shone in conspicuous rivalry with his father. But Mr. Saul's spirit was not so well tuned to the occasion as that of the rector or his son, and when he got upon his legs, and mournfully expressed a hope that his friend Mr. Fielding might be enabled to bear the trials of this life with fortitude, it was felt by them all that the speaking had better be brought to an end.

"You shouldn't laugh at him, Harry," Fanny said to her brother afterwards, almost seriously. "One man can do one thing and one another. You can make a speech better than he can, but I don't think you could preach so good a sermon."

"I declare I think you're getting fond of him after all," said Harry. Upon hearing this Fanny turned away with a look of great offence. "No one but a

said she, "would say such a thing as that to
because I don't like to hear the poor man ridi-
without cause." That evening, when they were
e, Fanny told Florence the whole story about Mr.
aul. "I tell you, you know, because you're like one
of ourselves now. It has never been mentioned to any
one out of the family."

Florence declared that the story would be sacred
with her.

"I'm sure of that, dear, and therefore I like you
to know it. Of course such a thing was quite out of
the question. The poor fellow has no means at all, —
literally none. And then, independently of that —"

"I don't think I should ever bring myself to think
of that as the first thing," said Florence.

"No, nor would I. If I really were attached to a
man, I think I would tell him so, and agree to wait,
either with hope or without it."

"Just so, Fanny."

"But there was nothing of that kind; and, indeed,
he's the sort of man that no girl would think of being
in love with, — isn't he? You see he will hardly
take the trouble to dress himself decently."

"I have only seen him at a wedding, you know."

"And for him he was quite bright. But you will
see plenty of him if you will go to the schools with
me. And indeed he comes here a great deal, quite as
much as he did before that happened. He is so good,
Florence!"

"Poor man!"

"I can't in the least make out from his manner
whether he has given up thinking about it. I suppose
he has. Indeed, of course he has, because he must

know that it would be of no sort of use. But he is one of those men of whom you can never say whether they are happy or not; and you never can be quite sure what may be in his mind."

"He is not bound to the place at all, — not like your father?"

"Oh, no," said Fanny, thinking perhaps that Mr. Saul might find himself to be bound to the place, though not exactly with bonds similar to those which kept her father there.

"If he found himself to be unhappy, he could go," said Florence.

"Oh, yes; he could go if he were unhappy," said Fanny. "That is, he could go if he pleased."

Lady Clavering had come to the wedding; but no one else had been present from the great house. Sir Hugh, indeed, was not at home; but, as the rector truly observed, he might have been at home if he had so pleased. "But he is a man," said the father to the son, who always does a rude thing if it be in his power. For myself, I care nothing for him, as he knows. But he thinks that Mary would have liked to have seen him as the head of the family, and therefore he does not come. He has greater skill in making himself odious than any man I ever knew. As for her, they say he's leading her a terrible life. And he's becoming so stingy about money, too!"

"I hear that Archie is very heavy on him."

"I don't believe that he would allow any man to be heavy on him, as you call it. Archie has means of his own, and I suppose has not run through them yet. If Hugh has advanced him money, you may be sure that he has security. As for Archie, he will

come to an end very soon, if what I hear is true. They tell me he is always at Newmarket, and that he always loses."

But though Sir Hugh was thus uncourteous to the rector and to the rector's daughter, he was so far prepared to be civil to his cousin Harry, that he allowed his wife to ask all the rectory family to dine up at the house, in honour of Harry's sweetheart. Florence Burton was specially invited with Lady Clavering's sweetest smile. Florence, of course, referred the matter to her hostess, but it was decided that they should all accept the invitation. It was given, personally, after the breakfast, and it is not always easy to decline invitations so given. It may, I think, be doubted whether any man or woman has a right to give an invitation in this way, and whether all invitations so given should not be null and void, from the fact of the unfair advantage that has been taken. The man who fires at a sitting bird is known to be no sportsman. Now, the dinner-giver who catches his guest in an unguarded moment, and bags him when he has had no chance to rise upon his wing, does fire at a sitting bird. In this instance, however, Lady Clavering's little speeches were made only to Mrs. Clavering and to Florence. She said nothing personally to the rector, and he therefore might have escaped. But his wife talked him over.

"I think you should go, for Harry's sake," said Mrs. Clavering.

"I don't see what good it will do Harry."

"It will show that you approve of the match."

"I don't approve or disapprove of it. He's his own master."

"But you do approve, you know, as you countenance it; and there cannot possibly be a sweeter girl than Florence Burton. We all like her, and I'm sure you seem to take to her thoroughly."

"Take to her; yes, I take to her very well. She's lady-like, and though she's no beauty, she looks pretty, and is spirited. And I daresay she's clever."

"And so good."

"If she's good, that's better than all. Only I don't see what they're to live on."

"But as she is here, you will go with us to the great house?"

Mrs. Clavering never asked her husband anything in vain, and the rector agreed to go. He apologized for this afterwards to his son by explaining that he did it as a duty. "It will serve for six months," he said. "If I did not go there about once in six months, there would be supposed to be a family quarrel, and that would be bad for the parish."

Harry was to remain only a week at Clavering, and the dinner was to take place the evening before he went away. On that morning he walked all round the park with Florence, — as he had before often walked with Julia, — and took that occasion of giving her a full history of the Clavering family. "We none of us like my cousin Hugh," he had said. "But she is at least harmless, and she means to be good-natured. She is very unlike her sister, Lady Ongar."

"So I should suppose, from what you have told me."

"Altogether an inferior being."

"And she has only one child."

"Only one, — a boy now two years old. They say he's anything but strong."

"And Sir Hugh has one brother."

"Yes; Archie Clavering. I think Archie is a worse fellow even than Hugh. He makes more attempts to be agreeable, but there is something in his eye which I always distrust. And then he is a man who does no good in the world to anybody."

"He's not married?"

"No; he's not married, and I don't suppose he ever will marry. It's on the cards, Florence, that the future baronet may be —" Then she frowned on him, walked on quickly, and changed the conversation.

CHAPTER XI.

Sir Hugh and his Brother Archie.

THERE was a numerous gathering of Claverings in the drawing-room of the Great House when the family from the rectory arrived, comprising three generations; for the nurse was in the room holding the heir in her arms. Mrs. Clavering and Fanny of course inspected the child at once, as they were bound to do, while Lady Clavering welcomed Florence Burton. Archie spoke a word or two to his uncle, and Sir Hugh vouchsafed to give one finger to his cousin Harry by way of shaking hands with him. Then there came a feeble squeak from the infant, and there was a cloud at once upon Sir Hugh's brow. "Hermione," he said, "I wish you wouldn't have the child in here. It's not the place for him. He's always cross. I've said a dozen times I wouldn't have him down here just before dinner." Then a sign was made to the nurse, and she walked off with her burden. It was a poor, rickety, unalluring bairn, but it was all that Lady Clavering

had, and she would fain have been allowed to show it to her relatives, as other mothers are allowed to do.

"Hugh," said his wife, "shall I introduce you to Miss Burton?"

Then Sir Hugh came forward and shook hands with his new guest, with some sort of apology for his remissness, while Harry stood by, glowering at him, with offence in his eye. "My father is right," he had said to himself when his cousin failed to notice Florence on her first entrance into the room; "he is impertinent as well as disagreeable. I don't care for quarrels in the parish, and so I shall let him know."

"Upon my word she's a doosed good-looking little thing," said Archie, coming up to him, after having also shaken hands with her; — "doosed good-looking, I call her."

"I'm glad you think so," said Harry, drily.

"Let's see; where was it you picked her up? I did hear, but I forget."

"I picked her up, as you call it, at Stratton, where her father lives."

"Oh, yes; I know. He's the fellow that coached you in your new business, isn't he? By-the-by, Harry, I think you've made a mess of it in changing your line. I'd have stuck to my governor's shop if I'd been you. You'd got through all the d—d fag of it, and there's the living, that has always belonged to a Clavering."

"What would your brother have said if I had asked him to give it to me?"

"He wouldn't have given it, of course. Nobody does give anything to anybody now-a-days. Livings

are a sort of thing that people buy. But you'd have got it under favourable circumstances."

"The fact is, Archie, I'm not very fond of the church, as a profession."

"I should have thought it easy work. Look at your father. He keeps a curate and doesn't take any trouble himself. Upon my word, if I'd known as much then as I do now, I'd have had a shy for it myself. Hugh couldn't have refused it to me."

"But Hugh can't give it while his uncle holds it."

"That would have been against me to be sure, and your governor's life is pretty nearly as good as mine. I shouldn't have liked waiting; so I suppose it's as well as it is."

There may perhaps have been other reasons why Archie Clavering's regrets that he did not take holy orders were needless. He had never succeeded in learning anything that any master had ever attempted to teach him, although he had shown considerable aptitude in picking up acquirements for which no regular masters are appointed. He knew the fathers and mothers, — sires and dams I ought perhaps to say, — and grandfathers and grandmothers, and so back for some generations, of all the horses of note living in his day. He knew also the circumstances of all races, — what horses would run at them, and at what ages, what were the stakes, the periods of running, and the special interests of each affair. But not, on that account, should it be thought that the turf had been profitable to him. That it might become profitable at some future time, was possible; but Captain Archibald Clavering had not yet reached the profitable stage in the career of a betting man, though perhaps he was

beginning to qualify himself for it. He was not bad-looking, though his face was unprepossessing to a judge of character. He was slight and well made, about five feet nine in height, with light brown hair, which had already left the top of his head bald, with slight whiskers, and a well-formed moustache. But the peculiarity of his face was in his eyes. His eyebrows were light-coloured and very slight, and this was made more apparent by the skin above the eyes, which was loose and hung down over the outside corners of them, giving him a look of cunning which was disagreeable. He seemed always to be speculating, counting up the odds, and calculating whether anything could be done with the events then present before him. And he was always ready to make a bet, being ever provided with a book for that purpose. He would take the odds that the sun did not rise on the morrow, and would either win the bet or wrangle in the losing of it. He would wrangle, but would do so noiselessly, never on such occasions damaging his cause by a loud voice. He was now about thirty-three years of age, and was two years younger than the baronet. Sir Hugh was not a gambler like his brother, but I do not know that he was therefore a more estimable man. He was greedy and anxious to increase his store, never willing to lose that which he possessed, fond of pleasure, but very careful of himself in the enjoyment of it, handsome, every inch an English gentleman in appearance, and therefore popular with men and women of his own class who were not near enough to him to know him well, given to but few words, proud of his name, and rank, and place, well versed in the business of the world, a match for most men in money

matters, not ignorant, though he rarely opened a book, selfish, and utterly regardless of the feelings of all those with whom he came in contact. Such were Sir Hugh Clavering, and his brother the captain.

Sir Hugh took Florence in to dinner, and when the soup had been eaten made an attempt to talk to her. "How long have you been here, Miss Burton?"

"Nearly a week," said Florence.

"Ah; — you came to the wedding; I was sorry I couldn't be here. It went off very well, I suppose?"

"Very well indeed, I think."

"They're tiresome things in general, — weddings. Don't you think so?"

"Oh dear, no, — except that some person one loves is always being taken away."

"You'll be the next person to be taken away yourself, I suppose?"

"I must be the next person at home, because I am the last that is left. All my sisters are married."

"And how many are there?"

"There are five married."

"Good heavens! Five!"

"And they are all married to men in the same profession as Harry."

"Quite a family affair," said Sir Hugh. Harry, who was sitting on the other side of Florence, heard this, and would have preferred that Florence should have said nothing about her sisters. "Why, Harry," said the baronet, "if you will go into partnership with your father-in-law and all your brothers-in-law you could stand against the world."

"You might add my four brothers," said Florence,

who saw no shame in the fact that they were all engaged in the same business.

"Good heaven!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, and after that he did not say much more to Florence.

The rector had taken Lady Clavering into dinner, and they two did manage to carry on between them some conversation respecting the parish affairs. Lady Clavering was not active among the poor, — nor was the rector himself, and perhaps neither of them knew how little the other did; but they could talk Clavering talk, and the parson was willing to take for granted his neighbour's good will to make herself agreeable. But Mrs. Clavering, who sat between Sir Hugh and Archie, had a very bad time of it. Sir Hugh spoke to her once during the dinner, saying that he hoped she was satisfied with her daughter's marriage; but even this he said in a tone that seemed to imply that any such satisfaction must rest on very poor grounds. "Thoroughly satisfied," said Mrs. Clavering, drawing herself up and looking very unlike the usual Mrs. Clavering of the rectory. After that there was no further conversation between her and Sir Hugh. "The worst of him to me is always this," she said that evening to her husband, "that he puts me so much out of conceit with myself. If I were with him long I should begin to find myself the most disagreeable woman in England!" "Then pray don't be with him long," said the rector.

But Archie made conversation throughout dinner, and added greatly to Mrs. Clavering's troubles by doing so. There was nothing in common between them, but still Archie went on laboriously with his work. It was a duty which he recognized, and at which he would work hard. When he had used up Mary's marriage, a sub-

ject which he economized carefully, so that he brought it down to the roast saddle of mutton, he began upon Harry's match. When was it to be? Where were they to live? Was there any money? What manner of people were the Burtons? Perhaps he might get over it? This he whispered very lowly, and it was the question next in sequence to that about the money. When, in answer to this, Mrs. Clavering with considerable energy declared that anything of that kind would be a misfortune of which there seemed to be no chance whatever, he recovered himself as he thought very skilfully. "Oh, yes; of course; that's just what I meant; — a doosed nice girl I think her; — a doosed nice girl, all round." Archie's questions were very laborious to his fellow-labourer in his conversation because he never allowed one of them to pass without an answer. He always recognized the fact that he was working hard on behalf of society, and, as he used to say himself, that he had no idea of pulling all the coach up the hill by his own shoulders. Whenever therefore he had made his effort he waited for his companion's, looking closely into her face, cunningly driving her on, so that she also should pull her share of the coach. Before dinner was over Mrs. Clavering found the hill to be very steep, and the coach to be very heavy. "I'll bet you seven to one," said he, — and this was his parting speech as Mrs. Clavering rose up at Lady Clavering's nod, — "I'll bet you seven to one that the whole box and dice of them are married before me, — or at any rate as soon; and I don't mean to remain single much longer, I can tell you." The "box and dice of them" was supposed to comprise Harry, Florence, Fanny, and Lady Ongar, of all of

whom mention had been made, and that saving clause, — “at any rate as soon,” — was cunningly put in, as it had occurred to Archie that he perhaps might be married on the same day as one of those other persons. But Mrs. Clavering was not compelled either to accept or reject the bet, as she was already moving before the terms had been fully explained to her.

Lady Clavering as she went out of the room stopped a moment behind Harry's chair and whispered a word to him. “I want to speak to you before you go to-night.” Then she passed on.

“What's that Hermione was saying?” asked Sir Hugh, when he had shut the door.

“She only told me that she wanted to speak to me.”

“She has always got some cursed secret,” said Sir Hugh. “If there is anything I hate, it's a secret.” Now this was hardly fair, for Sir Hugh was a man very secret in his own affairs, never telling his wife anything about them. He kept two bankers' accounts, so that no banker's clerk might know how he stood as regarded ready money, and hardly treated even his lawyer with confidence.

He did not move from his own chair, so that, after dinner, his uncle was not next to him. The places left by the ladies were not closed up, and the table was very uncomfortable.

“I see they're going to have another week after this with the Pytchley,” said Sir Hugh to his brother.

“I suppose they will, — or ten days. Things ain't very early this year.”

“I think I shall go down. It's never any use trying to hunt here after the middle of March.”

"You're rather short of foxes, are you not?" said the rector, making an attempt to join the conversation.

"Upon my word I don't know anything about it," said Sir Hugh.

"There are foxes at Clavering," said Archie, recommencing his duty. "The hounds will be here on Saturday, and I'll bet three to one I find a fox before twelve o'clock, or, say, half-past twelve, — that is, if they'll draw punctually and let me do as I like with the pack. I'll bet a guinea we find, and a guinea we run, and a guinea we kill; that is, you know, if they'll really look for a fox."

The rector had been willing to fall into a little hunting talk for the sake of society, but he was not prepared to go the length that Archie proposed to take him, and therefore the subject dropped.

"At any rate I shan't stay here after to-morrow," said Sir Hugh, still addressing himself to his brother. "Pass the wine, will you, Harry; that is, if your father is drinking any."

"No more wine for me," said the rector almost angrily.

"Liberty Hall," said Sir Hugh; "everybody does as they like about that. I mean to have another bottle of claret. Archie, ring the bell, will you?" Captain Clavering, though he was further from the bell than his elder brother, got up and did as he was bid. The claret came, and was drunk almost in silence. The rector, though he had a high opinion of the cellar of the great house, would take none of the new bottle, because he was angry. Harry filled his glass, and attempted to say something. Sir Hugh answered him

by a monosyllable, and Archie offered to bet him two to one that he was wrong.

"I'll go into the drawing-room," said the rector, getting up.

"All right," said Sir Hugh; "you'll find coffee there, I daresay. Has your father given up wine?" he asked, as soon as the door was closed.

"Not that I know of," said Harry.

"He used to take as good a whack as any man I know. The bishop hasn't put his embargo on that as well as the hunting, I hope?" To this Harry made no answer.

"He's in the blues, I think," said Archie. "Is there anything the matter with him, Harry?"

"Nothing, as far I know."

"If I were left at Clavering all the year, with nothing to do, as he is, I think I should drink a good deal of wine," said Sir Hugh. "I don't know what it is, — something in the air, I suppose, — but everybody always seems to me to be dreadfully dull here. You ain't taking any wine either. Don't stop here out of ceremony, you know, if you want to go after Miss Burton." Harry took him at his word, and went after Miss Burton, leaving the brothers together over their claret.

The two brothers remained drinking their wine, but they drank it in an uncomfortable fashion, not saying much to each other for the first ten minutes after the other Claverings were gone. Archie was in some degree afraid of his brother, and never offered to make any bets with him. Hugh had once put a stop to this altogether. "Archie," he had said, "pray understand that there is no money to be made out of me, at any

rate not by you. If you lost money to me, you wouldn't think it necessary to pay; and I certainly shall lose none to you." The habit of proposing to bet had become with Archie so much a matter of course, that he did not generally intend any real speculation by his offers; but with his brother he had dropped even the habit. And he seldom began any conversation with Hugh unless he had some point to gain, — an advance of money to ask, or some favour to beg in the way of shooting, or the loan of a horse. On such occasions he would commence the negotiation with his usual diplomacy, not knowing any other mode of expressing his wishes; but he was aware that his brother would always detect his manœuvres, and expose them before he had got through his first preface; and, therefore, as I have said, he was afraid of Hugh.

"I don't know what's come to my uncle of late," said Hugh, after a while. "I think I shall have to drop them at the rectory altogether."

"He never had much to say for himself."

"But he has a mode of expressing himself without speaking, which I do not choose to put up with at my table. The fact is they are going to the mischief at the rectory. His eldest girl has just married a curate."

"Fielding has got a living."

"It's something very small then, and I suppose Fanny will marry that prig they have there. My uncle himself never does any of his own work, and now Harry is going to make a fool of himself. I used to think he would fall on his legs."

"He is a clever fellow."

"Then why is he such a fool as to marry such a

girl as this, without money, good looks, or breeding? It's well for you he's such a fool, or else you wouldn't have a chance."

"I don't see that at all," said Archie.

"Julia always had a sneaking fondness for Harry, and if he had waited would have taken him now. She was very near making a fool of herself with him once, before Lord Ongar turned up."

To this Archie said nothing, but he changed colour, and it may almost be said of him that he blushed. Why he was affected in so singular a manner by his brother's words will be best explained by a statement of what took place in the back drawing-room a little later in the evening.

When Harry reached the drawing-room he went up to Lady Clavering, but she said nothing to him then of especial notice. She was talking to Mrs. Clavering, while the rector was reading, — or pretending to read, — a review, and the two girls were chattering together in another part of the room. Then they had coffee, and after awhile the two other men came in from their wine. Lady Clavering did not move at once, but she took the first opportunity of doing so, when Sir Hugh came up to Mrs. Clavering and spoke a word to her. A few minutes after that Harry found himself closeted with Lady Clavering, in a little room detached from the others, though the doors between the two were open.

"Do you know," said Lady Clavering, "that Sir Hugh has asked Julia to come here?" Harry paused a moment, and then acknowledged that he did know it.

"I hope you did not advise her to refuse."

"I advise her! Oh dear, no. She did not ask me anything about it."

"But she has refused. Don't you think she has been very wrong?"

"It is hard to say," said Harry. "You know I thought it very cruel that Hugh did not receive her immediately on her return. If I had been him I should have gone to Paris to meet her."

"It's no good talking of that now, Harry. Hugh is hard, and we all know that. Who feels it most, do you think — Julia or I? But as he has come round, what can she gain by standing off? Will it not be the best thing for her to come here?"

"I don't know that she has much to gain by it."

"Harry, — do you know that we have a plan?" "Who is we?" Harry asked; but she went on without noticing his question. "I tell you, because I believe you can help us more than any one, if you will. Only for your engagement with Miss Burton I should not mention it to you; and, but for that, the plan would, I dare say, be of no use."

"What is the plan?" said Harry, very gravely. A vague idea of what the plan might be had come across Harry's mind during Lady Clavering's last speech.

"Would it not be a good thing if Julia and Archie were to be married?" She asked the question in a quick, hesitating voice, looking at first eagerly up into his face, and then turning away her eyes, as though she were afraid of the answer she might read there. "Of course I know that you were fond of her, but all that can be nothing now."

"No," said Harry, "that can be nothing now."

"Then why shouldn't Archie have her? It would make us all so much more comfortable together. I told Archie that I should speak to you, because I know that you have more weight with her than any of us; but Hugh doesn't know that I mean it."

"Does Sir Hugh know of the, — the plan?"

"It was he who proposed it. Archie will be very badly off when he has settled with Hugh about all their money dealings. Of course Julia's money would be left in her own hands; there would be no intention to interfere with that. But the position would be so good for him; and it would, you know, put him on his legs."

"Yes," said Harry, "it would put him on his legs, I daresay."

"And why shouldn't it be so? She can't live alone by herself always. Of course she never could have really loved Lord Ongar."

"Never, I should think," said Harry.

"And Archie is good-natured, and good-tempered, and — and — and — good-looking. Don't you think so? I think it would just do for her. She'd have her own way, for he's not a bit like Hugh, you know. He's not so clever as Hugh, but he is much more good-natured. Don't you think it would be a good arrangement, Harry?" Then again she looked up into his face anxiously.

Nothing in the whole matter surprised him more than her eagerness in advocating the proposal. Why should she desire that her sister should be sacrificed in this way? But in so thinking of it he forgot her own position, and the need that there was to her for some friend to be near to her, — for some comfort and

assistance. She had spoken truly in saying that the plan had originated with her husband; but since it had been suggested to her, she had not ceased to think of it, and to wish for it.

"Well, Harry, what do you say?" she asked.

"I don't see that I have anything to say."

"But I know you can help us. When I was with her the last time, she declared that you were the only one of us she ever wished to see again. She meant to include me then especially, but of course she was not thinking of Archie. I know you can help us if you will."

"Am I to ask her to marry him?"

"Not exactly that; I don't think that would do any good. But you might persuade her to come here. I think she would come if you advised her; and then, after a bit, you might say a good word for Archie."

"Upon my word I could not."

"Why not, Harry?"

"Because I know he would not make her happy. What good would such a marriage do her?"

"Think of her position. No one will visit her unless she is first received here, or at any rate unless she comes to us in town. And then it would be up-hill work. Do you know Lord Ongar had absolutely determined at one time to — to get a divorce?"

"And do you believe that she was guilty?"

"I don't say that. No; why should I believe anything against my own sister when nothing is proved? But that makes no difference, if the world believes it. They say now that if he had lived three months longer she never would have got the money."

"Then they say lies. Who is it says so? A parcel

of old women who delight in having some one to run down and backbite. It is all false, Lady Clavering."

"But what does it signify, Harry? There she is, and you know how people are talking. Of course it would be best for her to marry again; and if she would take Archie, — Sir Hugh's brother, my brother-in-law, — nothing further would be said. She might go anywhere then. As her sister, I feel sure that it is the best thing she could do."

Harry's brow became clouded, and there was a look of anger on his face as he answered her.

"Lady Clavering," he said, "your sister will never marry my cousin Archie. I look upon the thing as impossible."

"Perhaps it is, Harry, that you, — you yourself would not wish it?"

"Why should I wish it?"

"He is your own cousin."

"Cousin indeed! Why should I wish it, or why should I not wish it? They are neither of them anything to me."

"She ought not to be anything to you."

"And she is nothing. She may marry Archie, if she pleases, for me. I shall not set her against him. But, Lady Clavering, you might as well tell him to get one of the stars. I don't think you can know your sister when you suppose such a match to be possible."

"Hermione!" shouted Sir Hugh, — and the shout was uttered in a voice that always caused Lady Clavering to tremble.

"I am coming," she said, rising from her chair. "Don't set yourself against it, Harry," and then, without waiting to hear him further, she obeyed her husband's

summons. "What the mischief keeps you in there?" he said. It seemed that things had not been going well in the larger room. The rector had stuck to his review, taking no notice of Sir Hugh when he entered. "You seem to be very fond of your book, all of a sudden," Sir Hugh had said, after standing silent on the rug for a few minutes.

"Yes, I am," said the rector, — "just at present."

"It's quite new with you, then," said Sir Hugh, "or else you're very much belied."

"Hugh," said Mr. Clavering, rising slowly from his chair, "I don't often come into my father's house, but when I do, I wish to be treated with respect. You are the only person in this parish that ever omits to do so."

"Bosh!" said Sir Hugh.

The two girls sat cowering in their seats, and poor Florence must have begun to entertain an uncomfortable idea of her future connexions. Archie made a frantic attempt to raise some conversation with Mrs. Clavering about the weather. Mrs. Clavering, paying no attention to Archie whatever, looked at her husband with beseeching eyes. "Henry," she said, "do not allow yourself to be angry; pray do not. What is the use?"

"None on earth," he said, returning to his book. "No use on earth; — and worse than none in showing it."

Then it was that Sir Hugh had made a diversion by calling to his wife. "I wish you'd stay with us, and not go off alone with one person in particular, in that way." Lady Clavering looked round and immediately saw that things were unpleasant. "Archie," she

said, "will you ring for tea?" And Archie did ring. The tea was brought, and a cup was taken all round, almost in silence.

Harry in the meantime remained by himself thinking of what he had heard from Lady Clavering. Archie Clavering marry Lady Ongar, — marry his Julia! It was impossible. He could not bring himself even to think of such an arrangement with equanimity. He was almost frantic with anger as he thought of this proposition to restore Lady Ongar to the position in the world's repute which she had a right to claim, by such a marriage as that. "She would indeed be disgraced then," said Harry to himself. But he knew that it was impossible. He could see what would be the nature of Julia's countenance if Archie should ever get near enough to her to make his proposal! Archie indeed! There was no one for whom, at that moment, he entertained so thorough a contempt as he did for his cousin, Archie Clavering.

Let us hope that he was no dog in the manger; — that the feelings which he now entertained for poor Archie would not have been roused against any other possible suitor who might have been named as a fitting husband for Lady Ongar. Lady Ongar could be nothing to him!

But I fear that he was a dog in the manger, and that any marriage contemplated for Lady Ongar, either by herself or by others for her, would have been distasteful to him, — unnaturally distasteful. He knew that Lady Ongar could be nothing to him; and yet, as he came out of the small room into the larger room, there was something sore about his heart, and the soreness was occasioned by the thought that any second

marriage should be thought possible for Lady Ongar. Florence smiled on him as he went up to her, but I doubt whether she would have smiled had she known all his heart.

Soon after that Mrs. Clavering rose to return home, having swallowed a peace-offering in the shape of a cup of tea. But though the tea had quieted the storm then on the waters, there was no true peace in the rector's breast. He shook hands cordially with Lady Clavering, without animosity with Archie, and then held out three fingers to the baronet. The baronet held out one finger. Each nodded at the other, and so they parted. Harry, who knew nothing of what had happened, and who was still thinking of Lady Ongar, busied himself with Florence, and they were soon out of the house, walking down the broad road from the front door.

"I will never enter that house again, when I know that Hugh Clavering is in it," said the rector.

"Don't make rash assertions, Henry," said his wife.

"I hope it is not rash, but I make that assertion," he said. "I will never again enter that house as my nephew's guest. I have borne a great deal for the sake of peace, but there are things which a man cannot bear."

Then, as they walked home, the two girls explained to Harry what had occurred in the larger room, while he was talking to Lady Clavering in the smaller one. But he said nothing to them of the subject of that conversation.

CHAPTER XII.

Lady Ongar takes Possession.

I DO not know that there is in England a more complete gentleman's residence than Ongar Park, nor could there be one in better repair, or more fit for immediate habitation than was that house when it came into the hands of the young widow. The park was not large, containing about sixty or seventy acres. But there was a home farm attached to the place, which also now belonged to Lady Ongar for her life, and which gave to the park itself an appearance of extent which it would otherwise have wanted. The house, regarded as a nobleman's mansion, was moderate in size, but it was ample for the requirements of any ordinarily wealthy family. The dining-room, library, drawing-rooms, and breakfast-room, were all large and well-arranged. The hall was handsome and spacious, and the bed-rooms were sufficiently numerous to make an auctioneer's mouth water. But the great charm of Ongar Park lay in the grounds immediately round the house, which sloped down from the terrace before the windows to a fast-running stream which was almost hidden, — but was not hidden, — by the shrubs on its bank. Though the domain itself was small, the shrubberies and walks were extensive. It was a place costly to maintain in its present perfect condition, but when that was said against it, all was said against it which its bitterest enemies could allege.

But Lady Ongar, with her large jointure, and with no external expenses whatever, could afford this delight without imprudence. Everything in and about the

place was her own, and she might live there happily, even in the face of the world's frowns, if she could teach herself to find happiness in rural luxuries. On her immediate return to England, her lawyer had told her that he found there would be opposition to her claim, and that an attempt would be made to keep the house out of her hands. Lord Ongar's people would, he said, bribe her to submit to this by immediate acquiescence as to her income. But she had declared that she would not submit, — that she would have house and income and all; and she had been successful. "Why should I surrender what is my own?" she had said, looking the lawyer full in the face. The lawyer had not dared to tell her that her opponents, — Lord Ongar's heirs, — had calculated on her anxiety to avoid exposure; but she knew that that was meant. "I have nothing to fear from them," she said, "and mean to claim what is my own by my settlement." There had, in truth, been no ground for disputing her right, and the place was given up to her before she had been three months in England. She at once went down and took possession, and there she was, alone, when her sister was communicating to Harry Clavering her plan about Captain Archie.

She had never seen the place till she reached it on this occasion; nor had she ever seen, nor would she now probably ever see, Lord Ongar's larger house, Courton Castle. She had gone abroad with him immediately on their marriage, and now she had returned a widow to take possession of his house. There she was in possession of it all. The furniture in the rooms, the books in the cases, the gilded clocks and grand mirrors about the house, all the implements of wealthy

care about the gardens, the corn in the granaries and the ricks in the hay-yard, the horses in the stable, and the cows lowing in the fields, — they were all hers. She had performed her part of the bargain, and now the price was paid to her into her hands. When she arrived she did not know what was the extent of her riches in this world's goods; nor, in truth, had she at once the courage to ask questions on the subject. She saw cows, and was told of horses; and words came to her gradually of sheep and oxen, of poultry, pigs, and growing calves. It was as though a new world had opened itself before her eyes, full of interest, and as though all that world were her own. She looked at it, and knew that it was the price of her bargain. Upon the whole she had been very lucky. She had, indeed, passed through a sharp agony, — an agony sharp almost to death; but the agony had been short, and the price was in her hand.

A close carriage had met her at the station, and taken her with her maid to the house. She had so arranged that she had reached the station after dark, and even then had felt that the eyes of many were upon her as she went out to her carriage, with her face covered by a veil. She was all alone, and there would be no one at the house to whom she could speak; — but the knowledge that the carriage was her own perhaps consoled her. The housekeeper who received her was a stout, elderly, comfortable body, to whom she could perhaps say a few words beyond those which might be spoken to an ordinary servant; but she fancied at once that the housekeeper was cold to her, and solemn in her demeanour. "I hope you have good fires, Mrs. Button." "Yes, my lady." "I

think I will have some tea; I don't want anything else to-night." "Very well, my lady." Mrs. Button, maintaining a solemn countenance, would not go beyond this; and yet Mrs. Button looked like a woman who could have enjoyed a gossip, had the lady been a lady to her mind. Perhaps Mrs. Button did not like serving a lady as to whom such sad stories were told. Lady Ongar, as she thought of this, drew herself up unconsciously, and sent Mrs. Button away from her.

The next morning, after an early breakfast, Lady Ongar went out. She was determined that she would work hard; that she would understand the farm; that she would know the labourers; that she would assist the poor; that she would have a school; and, above all, that she would make all the privileges of ownership her own. Was not the price in her hand, and would she not use it? She felt that it was very good that something of the price had come to her thus in the shape of land, and beeves, and wide, heavy outside garniture. From them she would pluck an interest which mere money could not have given her. She was out early, therefore, that she might look round upon the things that were her own.

And there came upon her a feeling that she would not empty this sweet cup at one draught, that she would dally somewhat with the rich banquet that was spread for her. She had many griefs to overcome, much sorrow to conquer, perhaps a long period of desolation to assuage, and she would not be prodigal of her resources. As she looked around her while she walked, almost furtively, lest some gardener as he spied her might guess her thoughts and tell how my

lady was revelling in her pride of possession, — it appeared to her that those novelties in which she was to find her new interest were without end. There was not a tree there, not a shrub, not a turn in the walks, which should not become her friend. She did not go far from the house, not even down to the water. She was husbanding her resources. But yet she lost herself amidst the paths, and tried to find a joy in feeling that she had done so. It was all her own. It was the price of what she had done; and the price was even now being paid into her hand, — paid with current coin and of full weight.

As she sat down alone to her breakfast, she declared to herself that this should be enough for her, — that it should satisfy her. She had made her bargain with her eyes open, and would not now ask for things which had not been stipulated in the contract. She was alone, and all the world was turning its back on her. The relatives of her late husband would, as a matter of course, be her enemies. Them she had never seen, and that they should speak evil of her seemed to be only natural. But her own relatives were removed from her by a gulf nearly equally wide. Of Brabazon cousins she had none nearer than the third or fourth degree of cousinship, and of them she had never taken heed, and expected no heed from them. Her set of friends would naturally have been the same as her sister's, and would have been made up of those she had known when she was one of Sir Hugh's family. But from Sir Hugh she was divided now as widely as from the Ongar people, and, — for any purposes of society, — from her sister also. Sir Hugh had allowed his wife to invite her to Clavering, but to this she

would not submit after Sir Hugh's treatment to her on her return. Though she had suffered much, her spirit was unbroken. Sir Hugh was, in truth, responsible for her reception in England. Had he come forward like a brother, all might have been well. But it was too late now for Sir Hugh Clavering to remedy the evil he had done, and he should be made to understand that Lady Ongar would not become a suppliant to him for mercy. She was striving to think how "rich she was in horses, how rich in brodered garments and in gold," as she sat solitary over her breakfast; but her mind would run off to other things, cumbering itself with unnecessary miseries and useless indignation. Had she not her price in her hand.

Would she see the steward that morning? No, — not that morning. Things outside could go on for a while in their course as heretofore. She feared to seem to take possession with pride, and then there was that conviction that it would be well to husband her resources. So she sent for Mrs. Button, and asked Mrs. Button to walk through the rooms with her. Mrs. Button came, but again declined to accept her lady's condescension. Every spot about the house, every room, closet, and wardrobe, she was ready to open with zeal; the furniture she was prepared to describe, if Lady Ongar would listen to her; but every word was spoken in a solemn voice, very far removed from gossiping. Only once was Mrs. Button moved to betray any emotion. "That, my lady, was my lord's mother's room, after my lord died, — my lord's father that was; may God bless her." Then Lady Ongar reflected that from her husband she had never heard a word either of his father or his mother. She wished that

she could seat herself with that woman in some small upstairs room, and then ask question after question about the family. But she did not dare to make the attempt. She could not bring herself to explain to Mrs. Button that she had never known anything of the belongings of her own husband.

When she had seen the upper part of the house, Mrs. Button offered to convoy her through the kitchen and servants' apartments, but she declined this for the present. She had done enough for the day. So she dismissed Mrs. Button, and took herself to the library. How often had she heard that books afforded the surest consolation to the desolate. She would take to reading; not on this special day, but as the resource for many days and months, and years to come. But this idea had faded and become faint before she had left the gloomy, damp-feeling, chill room, in which some former Lord Ongar had stored the musty volumes which he had thought fit to purchase. The library gave her no ease, so she went out again among the lawns and shrubs. For some time to come her best resources must be those which she could find outside the house.

Peering about, she made her way behind the stables, which were attached to the house, to a farmyard gate, through which the way led to the head-quarters of the live-stock. She did not go through, but she looked over the gate, telling herself that those barns and sheds, that wealth of straw-yard, those sleeping pigs and idle dreaming calves, were all her own. As she did so, her eye fell upon an old labourer, who was sitting close to her, on a felled tree, under the shelter of a paling, eating his dinner. A little girl, some six years

old, who had brought him his meal tied up in a handkerchief, was crouching near his feet. They had both seen her before she had seen them, and when she noticed them, were staring at her with all their eyes. She and they were on the same side of the farmyard paling, and so she could reach them and speak to them without difficulty. There was apparently no other person near enough to listen, and it occurred to her that she might at any rate make a friend of this old man. His name, he said, was Enoch Gubby, and the girl was his grandchild. Her name was Patty Gubby. Then Patty got up and had her head patted by her ladyship and received sixpence. They neither of them, however, knew who her ladyship was, and, as far as Lady Ongar could ascertain without a question too direct to be asked, had never heard of her. Enoch Gubby said he worked for Mr. Giles, the steward, — that was for my lord, and as he was old and stiff with rheumatism he only got eight shillings a week. He had a daughter, the mother of Patty, who worked in the fields, and got six shillings a week. Everything about the poor Gubbys seemed to be very wretched and miserable. Sometimes he could hardly drag himself about, he was so bad with the rheumatics. Then she thought that she would make one person happy, and told him that his wages should be raised to ten shillings a week. No matter whether he earned it or not, or what Mr. Giles might say, he should have ten shillings a week. Enoch Gubby bowed, and rubbed his head, and stared, and was in truth thankful because of the sixpence in ready money; but he believed nothing about the ten shillings. He did not especially disbelieve, but simply felt confident that he understood

nothing that was said to him. That kindness was intended, and that the sixpence was there, he did understand.

But Enoch Gubby got his weekly ten shillings, though Lady Ongar hardly realized the pleasure that she had expected from the transaction. She sent that afternoon to Mr. Giles, the steward, and told him what she had done. Mr. Giles did not at all approve, and spoke his disapproval very plainly, though he garnished his rebuke with a great many "my lady's." The old man was a hanger-on about the place, and for years had received eight shillings a week, which he had not half earned. "Now he will have ten, that is all," said Lady Ongar. Mr. Giles acknowledged that if her ladyship pleased, Enoch Gubby must have the ten shillings, but declared that the business could not be carried on in that way. Everybody about the place would expect an addition, and those people who did earn what they received, would think themselves cruelly used in being worse treated than Enoch Gubby, who, according to Mr. Giles, was by no means the most worthy old man in the parish. And as for his daughter — oh! Mr. Giles could not trust himself to talk about the daughter to her ladyship. Before he left her, Lady Ongar was convinced that she had made a mistake. Not even from charity will pleasure come, if charity be taken up simply to appease remorse.

The price was in her hand. For a fortnight the idea clung to her, that gradually she would realize the joys of possession; but there was no moment in which she could tell herself that the joy was hers. She was now mistress of the geography of the place. There was no more losing herself amidst the shrubberies, no

thought of economizing her resources. Of Mr. Giles and his doings she still knew very little, but the desire of knowing much had faded. The ownership of the haystacks had become a thing tame to her, and the great cart-horses, as to every one of which she had intended to feel an interest, were matters of indifference to her. She observed that since her arrival a new name in new paint, — her own name, — was attached to the carts, and that the letters were big and glaring. She wished that this had not been done, or, at any rate, that the letters had been smaller. Then she began to think that it might be well for her to let the farm to a tenant; not that she might thus get more money, but because she felt that the farm would be a trouble. The apples had indeed quickly turned to ashes between her teeth!

On the first Sunday that she was at Ongar Park she went to the parish church. She had resolved strongly that she would do this, and she did it; but when the moment for starting came, her courage almost failed her. The church was but a few yards from her own gate, and she walked there without any attendant. She had, however, sent word to the sexton to say that she would be there, and the old man was ready to show her into the family pew. She wore a thick veil, and was dressed, of course, in all the deep ceremonious woe of widowhood. As she walked up the centre of the church she thought of her dress, and told herself that all there would know how it had been between her and her husband. She was pretending to mourn for the man to whom she had sold herself; for the man who through happy chance had died so quickly, leaving her with the price in her hand! All of course

knew that, and all thought that they knew, moreover, that she had been foully false to her bargain, and had not earned the price! That, also, she told herself. But she went through it, and walked out of the church among the village crowd with her head on high.

Three days afterwards she wrote to the clergyman, asking him to call on her. She had come, she said, to live in the parish, and hoped to be able, with his assistance, to be of some use among the people. She would hardly know how to act without some counsel from him. The schools might be all that was excellent, but if there was anything required she hoped he would tell her. On the following morning the clergyman called, and, with many thanks for her generosity, listened to her plans, and accepted her subsidies. But he was a married man, and he said nothing of his wife, nor during the next week did his wife come to call on her. She was to be left desolate by all, because men had told lies of her.

She had the price in her hands, but she felt herself tempted to do as Judas did, — to go out and hang herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

A Visitor calls at Ongar Park.

It will be remembered that Harry Clavering, on returning one evening to his lodgings in Bloomsbury Square, had been much astonished at finding there the card of Count Pateroff, a man of whom he had only heard, up to that moment, as the friend of the late Lord Ongar. At first he had been very angry with

Lady Ongar, thinking that she and this count were in some league together, some league of which he would greatly disapprove; but his anger had given place to a new interest when he learned direct from herself that she had not seen the count, and that she was simply anxious that he, as her friend, should have an interview with the man. He had then become very eager in the matter, offering to subject himself to any amount of inconvenience so that he might effect that which Lady Ongar asked of him. He was not, however, called upon to endure any special trouble or expense, as he heard nothing more from Count Pateroff till he had been back in London for two or three weeks.

Lady Ongar's statement to him had been quite true. It had been even more than true; for when she had written she had not even heard directly from the count. She had learned by letter from another person that Count Pateroff was in London, and had then communicated the fact to her friend. This other person was a sister of the count's, who was now living in London, one Madame Gordeloup, — Sophie Gordeloup, — a lady whom Harry had found sitting in Lady Ongar's room when last he had seen her in Bolton Street. He had not then heard her name; nor was he aware then, or for some time subsequently, that Count Pateroff had any relative in London.

Lady Ongar had been a fortnight in the country before she received Madame Gordeloup's letter. In that letter the sister had declared herself to be most anxious that her brother should see Lady Ongar. The letter had been in French, and had been very eloquent, — more eloquent in its cause than any letter with the

same object could have been if written by an English-woman in English; and the eloquence was less offensive than it might, under all concurrent circumstances, have been had it reached Lady Ongar in English. The reader must not, however, suppose that the letter contained a word that was intended to support a lover's suit. It was very far indeed from that, and spoke of the count simply as a friend; but its eloquence went to show that nothing that had passed should be construed by Lady Ongar as offering any bar to a fair friendship. What the world said! — Bah! Did not she know, — she, Sophie, — and did not her friend know, — her friend Julie, — that the world was a great liar? Was it not even now telling wicked venomous lies about her friend Julie? Why mind what the world said, seeing that the world could not be brought to speak one word of truth? The world indeed! Bah!

But Lady Ongar, though she was not as yet more than half as old as Madame Gordeloup, knew what she was about almost as well as that lady knew what Sophie Gordeloup was doing. Lady Ongar had known the count's sister in France and Italy, having seen much of her in one of those sudden intimacies to which English people are subject when abroad; and she had been glad to see Madame Gordeloup in London, — much more glad than she would have been had she been received there on her return by a crowd of loving native friends. But not on that account was she prepared to shape her conduct in accordance with her friend Sophie's advice, and especially not so when that advice had reference to Sophie's brother. She had, therefore, said very little in return to the lady's eloquence, answering the letter on that matter very

vaguely; but, having a purpose of her own, had begged that Count Pateroff might be asked to call upon Harry Clavering. Count Pateroff did not feel himself to care very much about Harry Clavering, but wishing to do as he was bidden, did leave his card in Bloomsbury Square.

And why was Lady Ongar anxious that the young man who was her friend should see the man who had been her husband's friend, and whose name had been mixed with her own in so grievous a manner? She had called Harry her friend, and it might be that she desired to give this friend every possible means of testing the truth of that story which she herself had told. The reader, perhaps, will hardly have believed in Lady Ongar's friendship; — will, perhaps, have believed neither the friendship nor the story. If so, the reader will have done her wrong, and will not have read her character aright. The woman was not heartless because she had once, in one great epoch of her life, betrayed her own heart; nor was she altogether false because she had once lied; nor altogether vile, because she had once taught herself that, for such an one as her, riches were a necessity. It might be that the punishment of her sin could meet with no remission in this world, but not on that account should it be presumed that there was no place for repentance left to her.

As she walked alone through the shrubberies at Ongar Park she thought much of those other paths at Clavering, and of the walks in which she had not been alone; and she thought of that interview in the garden when she had explained to Harry, — as she had then thought so successfully, — that they two,

each being poor, were not fit to love and marry each other. She had brooded over all that, too, during the long hours of her sad journey home to England. She was thinking of it still when she had met him, and had been so cold to him on the platform of the railway station, when she had sent him away angry because she had seemed to slight him. She had thought of it as she had sat in her London room, telling him the terrible tale of her married life, while her eyes were fixed on his and her head was resting on her hands. Even then, at that moment, she was asking herself whether he believed her story, or whether, within his breast, he was saying that she was vile and false. She knew that she had been false to him, and that he must have despised her when, with her easy philosophy, she had made the best of her own mercenary perfidy. He had called her a jilt to her face, and she had been able to receive the accusation with a smile. Would he now call her something worse, and with a louder voice, within his own bosom? And if she could convince him that to that accusation she was not fairly subject, might the old thing come back again? Would he walk with her again, and look into her eyes as though he only wanted her commands to show himself ready to be her slave? She was a widow, and had seen many things, but even now she had not reached her six-and-twentieth year.

The apples at her rich country-seat had quickly become ashes between her teeth, but something of the juice of the fruit might yet reach her palate if he would come and sit with her at the table. As she complained to herself of the coldness of the world, she thought that she would not care how cold might be all the

world if there might be but one whom she could love, and who would love her. And him she had loved. To him, in old days, — in days which now seemed to her to be very old, — she had made confession of her love. Old as were those days, 'it could not be but he should still remember them. She had loved him, and him only. To none other had she ever pretended love. From none other had love been offered to her. Between her and that wretched being to whom she had sold herself, who had been half dead before she had seen him, there had been no pretence of love. But Harry Clavering she had loved. Harry Clavering was a man, with all those qualities which she valued, and also with those foibles which saved him from being too perfect for so slight a creature as herself. Harry had been offended to the quick, and had called her a jilt; but yet it might be possible that he would return to her.

It should not be supposed that since her return to England she had had one settled, definite object before her eyes with regard to this renewal of her love. There had been times in which she had thought that she would go on with the life which she had prepared for herself, and that she would make herself contented, if not happy, with the price which had been paid to her. And there were other times, in which her spirits sank low within her, and she told herself that no contentment was any longer possible to her. She looked at herself in the glass, and found herself to be old and haggard. Harry, she said, was the last man in the world to sell himself for wealth, when there was no love remaining. Harry would never do as she had done with herself! Not for all the wealth that woman

ever inherited, — so she told herself, — would he link himself to one who had made herself vile and tainted among women! In this, I think, she did him no more than justice, though it may be that in some other matters she rated his character too highly. Of Florence Burton she had as yet heard nothing, though had she heard of her, it may well be that she would not on that account have desisted. Such being her thoughts and her hopes, she had written to Harry, begging him to see this man who had followed her, — she knew not why, — from Italy; and had told the sister simply that she could not do as she was asked, because she was away from London, alone in a country house.

And quite alone she was sitting one morning, counting up her misery, feeling that the apples were, in truth, ashes, when a servant came to her, telling her that there was a gentleman in the hall desirous of seeing her. The man had the visitor's card in his hand, but before she could read the name, the blood had mounted into her face as she told herself that it was Harry Clavering. There was joy for a moment at her heart; but she must not show it, — not as yet. She had been but four months a widow, and he should not have come to her in the country. She must see him and in some way make him understand this, — but she would be very gentle with him. Then her eye fell upon the card, and she saw, with grievous disappointment, that it bore the name of Count Pateroff. No; — she was not going to be caught in that way. Let the result be what it might, she would not let Sophie Gordeloup, or Sophie's brother, get the better of her by such a ruse as that! "Tell the gentleman,

with my compliments," she said, as she handed back the card, "that I regret it greatly, but I can see no one now." Then the servant went away, and she sat wondering whether the count would be able to make his way into her presence. She felt rather than knew that she had some reason to fear him. All that had been told of him and of her had been false. No accusation brought against her had contained one spark of truth. But there had been things between Lord Ongar and this man which she would not care to have told openly in England. And though, in his conduct to her, he had been customarily courteous, and on one occasion had been generous, still she feared him. She would much rather that he should have remained in Italy. And though, when all alone in Bolton Street, she had in her desolation welcomed his sister Sophie, she would have preferred that Sophie should not have come to her, claiming to renew their friendship. But with the count she would hold no communion now, even though he should find his way into the room.

A few minutes passed before the servant returned, and then he brought a note with him. As the door opened Lady Ongar rose, ready to leave the room by another passage; but she took the note and read it. It was as follows: — "I cannot understand why you should refuse to see me, and I feel aggrieved. My present purpose is to say a few words to you on private matters connected with papers that belonged to Lord Ongar. I still hope that you will admit me. — P." Having read these words while standing, she made an effort to think what might be the best course for her to follow. As for Lord Ongar's papers, she did not believe in the plea. Lord Ongar could have had no

papers interesting to her in such a manner as to make her desirous of seeing this man or of hearing of them in private. Lord Ongar, though she had nursed him to the hour of his death, earning her price, had been her bitterest enemy; and though there had been something about this count that she had respected, she had known him to be a man of intrigue and afraid of no falsehoods in his intrigues, — a dangerous man, who might perhaps now and again do a generous thing, but one who would expect payment for his generosity. Besides, had he not been named openly as her lover? She wrote to him, therefore, as follows: — “Lady Ongar presents her compliments to Count Pateroff, and finds it to be out of her power to see him at present.” This answer the visitor took and walked away from the front door without showing any disgust to the servant, either by his demeanour or in his countenance. On that evening she received from him a long letter, written at the neighbouring inn, expostulating with her as to her conduct towards him, and saying in the last line, that it was “impossible now that they should be strangers to each other.” “Impossible that we should be strangers!” she said almost aloud. “Why impossible? I know no such impossibility.” After that she carefully burned both the letter and the note.

She remained at Ongar Park something over six weeks, and then, about the beginning of May, she went back to London. No one had been to see her, except Mr. Sturm, the clergyman of the parish; and he, though something almost approaching to an intimacy had sprung up between them, had never yet spoken to her of his wife. She was not quite sure whether her rank might not deter him, — whether under such

circumstances as those now in question, the ordinary social rules were not ordinarily broken, — whether a countess should not call on a clergyman's wife first, although the countess might be the stranger; but she did not dare to do as she would have done, had no blight attached itself to her name. She gave, therefore, no hint; she said no word of Mrs. Sturm, though her heart was longing for a kind word from some woman's mouth. But she allowed herself to feel no anger against the husband, and went through her parish work, thanking him for his assistance.

Of Mr. Giles she had seen very little, and since her misfortune with Enoch Gubby, she had made no further attempt to interfere with the wages of the persons employed. Into the houses of some of the poor she had made her way, but she fancied that they were not glad to see her. They might, perhaps, have all heard of her reputation, and Gubby's daughter may have congratulated herself that there was another in the parish as bad as herself, or perhaps, happily, worse. The owner of all the wealth around strove to make Mrs. Button become a messenger of charity between herself and some of the poor; but Mrs. Button altogether declined the employment, although, as her mistress had ascertained, she herself performed her own little missions of charity with zeal. Before the fortnight was over, Lady Ongar was sick of her house and her park, utterly disregarding of her horses and oxen, and unmindful even of the pleasant stream which in these spring days rippled softly at the bottom of her gardens.

She had undertaken to be back in London early in May, by appointment with her lawyer, and had un-

fortunately communicated the fact to Madame Gordeloup. Four or five days before she was due in Bolton Street, her mindful Sophie, with unerring memory, wrote to her, declaring her readiness to do all and anything that the most diligent friendship could prompt. Should she meet her dear Julie at the station in London? Should she bring any special carriage? Should she order any special dinner in Bolton Street? She herself would of course come to Bolton Street, if not allowed to be present at the station. It was still chilly in the evenings, and she would-have fires lit. Might she suggest a roast fowl and some bread sauce, and perhaps a sweetbread, — and just one glass of champagne? And might she share the banquet? There was not a word in the note about the too obtrusive brother, either as to the offence committed by him, or the offence felt by him.

The little Franco-Polish woman was there in Bolton Street, of course, — for Lady Ongar had not dared to refuse her. A little, dry, bright woman she was, with quick eyes, and thin lips, and small nose, and mean forehead, and scanty hair drawn back quite tightly from her face and head; very dry, but still almost pretty with her quickness and her brightness. She was fifty, was Sophie Gordeloup, but she had so managed her years that she was as active on her limbs as most women are at twenty-five. And the chicken and the bread-sauce, and the sweetbread, and the champagne were there, all very good of their kind; for Sophie Gordeloup liked such things to be good, and knew how to indulge her own appetite, and to coax that of another person.

Some little satisfaction Lady Ongar received from

the fact that she was not alone; but the satisfaction was not satisfactory. When Sophie had left her at ten o'clock, running off by herself to her lodgings in Mount Street, Lady Ongar, after but one moment's thought, sat down and wrote a note to Harry Clavering.

"DEAR HARRY, — I am back in town. Pray come and see me to-morrow evening.

"Yours ever,
"J. O."

CHAPTER XIV.

Count Pateroff and his Sister.

AFTER an interval of some weeks, during which Harry had been down at Clavering and had returned again to his work at the Adelphi, Count Pateroff called again in Bloomsbury Square; — but Harry was at Mr. Beilby's office. Harry at once returned the count's visit at the address given in Mount Street. Madame was at home, said the servant-girl, from which Harry was led to suppose that the count was a married man; but Harry felt that he had no right to intrude upon madame, so he simply left his card. Wishing, however, really to have this interview, and having been lately elected at a club of which he was rather proud, he wrote to the count asking him to dine with him at the Beaufort. He explained that there was a strangers' room, — which Pateroff knew very well, having often dined at the Beaufort, — and said something as to a private little dinner for two, thereby apologizing for proposing to the count to dine without other guests. Pateroff accepted the invitation, and Harry, never hav-

ing done such a thing before, ordered his dinner with much nervousness.

The count was punctual, and the two men introduced themselves. Harry had expected to see a handsome foreigner, with black hair, polished whiskers, and probably a hook nose, — forty years of age or thereabouts, but so got up as to look not much more than thirty. But his guest was by no means a man of that stamp. Excepting that the count's age was altogether uncertain, no correctness of guess on that matter being possible by means of his appearance, Harry's preconceived notion was wrong in every point. He was a fair man, with a broad fair face, and very light blue eyes; his forehead was low, but broad; he wore no whiskers, but bore on his lip a heavy moustache, which was not grey, but perfectly white — white it was with years, of course, but yet it gave no sign of age to his face. He was well made, active, and somewhat broad in the shoulders, though rather below the middle height. But for a certain ease of manner which he possessed, accompanied by something of restlessness in his eye, any one would have taken him for an Englishman. And his speech hardly betrayed that he was not English. Harry, knowing that he was a foreigner, noticed now and again some little acquired distinctness of speech which is hardly natural to a native; but otherwise there was nothing in his tongue to betray him.

"I am sorry that you should have had so much trouble," he said, shaking hands with Harry. Clavering declared that he had incurred no trouble, and declared also that he would be only too happy to have taken any trouble in obeying a behest from his friend Lady Ongar. Had he been a Pole as was the count,

he would not have forgotten to add that he would have been equally willing to exert himself with the view of making the count's acquaintance; but being simply a young Englishman, he was much too awkward for any such courtesy as that. The count observed the omission, smiled, and bowed. Then he spoke of the weather, and said that London was a magnificent city. Oh, yes, he knew London well, — had known it these twenty years; — had been for fifteen years a member of the Travellers'; — he liked everything English, except hunting. English hunting he had found to be dull work. But he liked shooting for an hour or two. He could not rival, he said, the intense energy of an Englishman, who would work all day with his guns harder than ploughmen with their ploughs. Englishmen sported, he said, as though more than their bread, — as though their honour, their wives, their souls, depended on it. It was very fine! He often wished that he was an Englishman. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

Harry was very anxious to commence a conversation about Lady Ongar, but he did not know how at first to introduce her name. Count Pateroff had come to him at Lady Ongar's request, and, therefore, as he thought, the count should have been the first to mention her. But the count seemed to be enjoying his dinner without any thought either of Lady Ongar or of her late husband. At this time he had been down to Ongar Park, on that mission, which had been, as we know, futile; but he said no word of that to Harry. He seemed to enjoy his dinner thoroughly, and made himself very agreeable. When the wine was discussed he told Harry that a certain vintage of Moselle was

very famous at the Beaufort. Harry ordered the wine of course, and was delighted to give his guest the best of everything; but he was a little annoyed at finding that the stranger knew his club better than he knew it himself. Slowly the count ate his dinner, enjoying every morsel that he took with that thoughtful, conscious pleasure which young men never attain in eating and drinking, and which men as they grow older so often forget to acquire. But the count never forgot any of his own capacities for pleasure, and in all things made the most of his own resources. To be rich is not to have one or ten thousand a year, but to be able to get out of that one or ten thousand all that every pound, and every shilling, and every penny will give you. After this fashion the count was a rich man.

"You don't sit after dinner here, I suppose," said the count, when he had completed an elaborate washing of his mouth and moustache. "I like this club, because we who are strangers have so charming a room for our smoking. It is the best club in London for men who do not belong to it."

It occurred to Harry that in the smoking-room there could be no privacy. Three or four men had already spoken to the count, showing that he was well known, giving notice, as it were, that Pateroff would become a public man when once he was placed in a public circle. To have given a dinner to the count, and to have spoken no word to him about Lady Ongar, would be by no means satisfactory to Harry's feelings, though, as it appeared, it might be sufficiently satisfactory to the guest. Harry therefore suggested one bottle of claret. The count agreed, expressing an

opinion that the '51 Lafitte was unexceptionable. The '51 Lafitte was ordered, and Harry, as he filled his glass, considered the way in which his subject should be introduced.

"You knew Lord Ongar, I think, abroad?"

"Lord Ongar, — abroad! Oh, yes, very well; and for many years here in London; and at Vienna; and very early in life at St. Petersburg. I knew Lord Ongar first in Russia when he was attached to the embassy as Frederic Courton. His father, Lord Courton, was then alive, as was also his grandfather. He was a nice, good-looking lad then."

"As regards his being nice, he seems to have changed a good deal before he died." This the count noticed by simply shrugging his shoulders and smiling as he sipped his wine. "By all that I can hear he became a horrid brute when he married," said Harry, energetically.

"He was not pleasant when he was ill at Florence," said the count.

"She must have had a terrible time with him," said Harry.

The count put up his hands, again shrugged his shoulders, and then shook his head. "She knew he was no longer an Adonis when he married her."

"An Adonis! No; she did not expect an Adonis; but she thought he would have something of the honour and feelings of a man."

"She found it uncomfortable, no doubt. He did too much of this, you know," said the count, raising his glass to his lips; "and he didn't do it with '51 Lafitte. That was Ongar's fault. All the world knew

it for the last ten years. No one knew it better than Hugh Clavering."

"But —" said Harry, and then he stopped. He hardly knew what it was that he wished to learn from the man, though he certainly did wish to learn something. He had thought that the count would himself have talked about Lady Ongar and those Florentine days, but this he did not seem disposed to do. "Shall we have our cigars now?" said Count Pateroff.

"One moment, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, certainly. There is no hurry."

"You will take no more wine?"

"No more wine. I take my wine at dinner, as you saw."

"I want to ask you one special question, — about Lady Ongar."

"I will say anything in her favour that you please. I am always ready to say anything in the favour of any lady, and, if needs be, to swear it. But anything against any lady nobody ever heard me say."

Harry was sharp enough to perceive that any assertion made under such a stipulation was worse than nothing. It was as when a man, in denying the truth of a statement, does so with an assurance that on that subject he should consider himself justified in telling any number of lies. "I did not write the book, — but you have no right to ask the question; and I should say that I had not, even if I had." Pateroff was speaking of Lady Ongar in this way, and Harry hated him for doing so.

"I don't want you to say any good of her," said he, "or any evil."

"I certainly shall say no evil of her."

"But I think you know that she has been most cruelly treated."

"Well, there is about seven — thousand — pounds a year, I think! Seven — thousand — a year! Not francs, but pounds! We poor foreigners lose ourselves in amazement when we hear about your English fortunes. Seven thousand pounds a year for a lady all alone, and a beautiful house! A house so beautiful, they tell me!"

"What has that to do with it?" said Harry; whereupon the count again shrugged his shoulders. "What has that to do with it? Because the man was rich he was not justified in ill-treating his wife. Did he not bring false accusations against her, in order that he might rob her after his death of all that of which you think so much? Did he not bear false witness against her, to his own dishonour?"

"She has got the money, I think, — and the beautiful house."

"But her name was been covered with lies."

"What can I do? Why do you ask me? I know nothing. Look here, Mr. Clavering, if you want to make any inquiry you had better go to my sister. I don't see what good it will do, but she will talk to you by the hour together, if you wish it. Let us smoke."

"Your sister?"

"Yes, my sister. Madame Gordeloup is her name. Has not Lady Ongar mentioned my sister? They are inseparables. My sister lives in Mount Street."

"With you?"

"No, not with me; I do not live in Mount Street. I have my address sometimes at her house."

"Madame Gordeloup?"

"Yes, Madame Gordeloup. She is Lady Ongar's friend. She will talk to you."

"Will you introduce me, Count Pateroff?"

"Oh, no; it is not necessary. You can go to Mount Street, and she will be delighted. There is the card. And now we will smoke." Harry felt that he could not, with good-breeding, detain the count any longer, and therefore, rising from his chair, led the way into the smoking-room. When there, the man of the world separated himself from his young friend, of whose enthusiasm he had perhaps had enough, and was soon engaged in conversation with sundry other men of his own standing. Harry soon perceived that his guest had no further need of his countenance, and went home to Bloomsbury Square by no means satisfied with his new acquaintance.

On the next day he dined in Onslow Crescent with the Burtons, and when there he said nothing about Lady Ongar or Count Pateroff. He was not aware that he had any special reason for being silent on the subject, but he made up his mind that the Burtons were people so far removed in their sphere of life from Lady Ongar, that the subject would not be suitable in Onslow Crescent. It was his lot in life to be concerned with people of the two classes. He did not at all mean to say, — even to himself, — that he liked the Ongar class the better; but still, as such was his lot, he must take it as it came, and entertain both subjects of interest, without any commingling of them one with another. Of Lady Ongar and his early love he had spoken to Florence at some length, but he did not find it necessary in his letters to tell her anything of Count

Pateroff and his dinner at the Beaufort. Nor did he mention the dinner to his dear friend Cecilia. On this occasion he made himself very happy in Onslow Crescent, playing with the children, chatting with his friend, and enduring with a good grace Theodore Burton's sarcasm, when that ever studious gentleman told him that he was only fit to go about tied to a woman's apron-string.

On the following day, about five o'clock, he called in Mount Street. He had doubted much as to this, thinking that at any rate he ought, in the first place, to write and ask permission. But at last he resolved that he would take the count at his word, and presenting himself at the door, he sent up his name. Madame Gordeloup was at home, and in a few moments he found himself in the room in which the lady was sitting, and recognized her whom he had seen with Lady Ongar in Bolton Street. She got up at once, having glanced at the name upon the card, and seemed to know all about him. She shook hands with him cordially, almost squeezing his hand, and bade him sit down near her on the sofa. "She was so glad to see him, for her dear Julie's sake. Julie, as of course he knew, was at 'Ongere' Park. Oh! so happy," — which, by the by, he did not know, — "and would be up in the course of next week. So many things to do, of course, Mr. Clavering. The house, and the servants, and the park, and the beautiful things of a large country establishment! But it was delightful, and Julie was quite happy!"

No people could be more unlike to each other than this brother and his sister. No human being could have taken Madame Gordeloup for an Englishwoman, though

it might be difficult to judge, either from her language or her appearance, of the nationality to which she belonged. She spoke English with great fluency, but every word uttered declared her not to be English. And when she was most fluent she was most incorrect in her language. She was small, eager, and quick, and appeared quite as anxious to talk as her brother had been to hold his tongue. She lived in a small room on the first floor of a small house; and it seemed to Harry that she lived alone. But he had not been long there before she had told him all her history, and explained to him most of her circumstances. That she kept back something is probable; but how many are there who can afford to tell everything?

Her husband was still living, but he was at St. Petersburg. He was a Frenchman by family, but had been born in Russia. He had been attached to the Russian embassy in London, but was now attached to diplomacy in general in Russia. She did not join him because she loved England, — oh, so much! And, perhaps, her husband might come back again some day. She did not say that she had not seen him for ten years, and was not quite sure whether he was dead or alive; but had she made a clean breast in all things she might have done so. She said that she was a good deal still at the Russian embassy; but she did not say that she herself was a paid spy. Nor do I say so now, positively; but that was the character given to her by many who knew her. She called her brother Edouard, as though Harry had known the count all his life; and always spoke of Lady Ongar as Julie. She uttered one or two little hints which seemed to imply that she knew everything that had passed be-

tween "Julie" and Harry Clavering in early days; and never mentioned Lord Ongar without some term of violent abuse.

"Horrid wretch!" she said, pausing over all the *r*'s in the name she had called him. "It began, you know, from the very first. Of course he had been a fool. An old roué is always a fool to marry. What does he get, you know, for his money? A pretty face. He's tired of that as soon as it's his own. Is it not so, Mr. Clavering? But other people ain't tired of it, and then he becomes jealous. But Lord Ongar was not jealous. He was not man enough to be jealous. Hor-r-rid wr-retch!" She then went on telling many things which, as he listened, almost made Harry Clavering's hair stand on end, and which must not be repeated here. She herself had met her brother in Paris, and had been with him when they encountered the Ongars in that capital. According to her showing, they had, all of them, been together nearly from that time to the day of Lord Ongar's death. But Harry soon learned to feel that he could not believe all that the little lady told him.

"Edouard was always with him. Poor Edouard!" she said. "There was some money matter between them about écarté. When that wr-retch got to be so bad, he did not like parting with his money, — not even when he had lost it! And Julie had been so good always! Julie and Edouard had done everything for the nasty wr-retch." Harry did not at all like this mingling of the names of Julie and Edouard, though it did not for a moment fill his mind with any suspicion as to Lady Ongar. It made him feel, however, that this woman was dangerous, and that her tongue

might be very mischievous if she talked to others as she did to him. As he looked at her, — and being now in her own room she was not dressed with scrupulous care, — and as he listened to her, he could not conceive what Lady Ongar had seen in her that she should have made a friend of her. Her brother, the count, was undoubtedly a gentleman in his manners and way of life, but he did not know by what name to call this woman, who called Lady Ongar “Julie.” She was altogether unlike any ladies whom he had known.

“You know that Julia will be in town next week?”

“No; I did not know when she was to return.”

“Oh, yes; she has business with those people in South Audley Street on Thursday. Poor dear! Those lawyers are so harassing! But when people have seven — thousand — pounds a year, they must put up with lawyers.” As she pronounced those talismanic words, which to her were almost celestial, Harry perceived for the first time that there was some sort of resemblance between her and the count. He could see that they were brother and sister. “I shall go to her directly she comes, and of course I will tell her how good you have been to come to me. And Edouard has been dining with you? How good of you. He told me how charming you are,” — Harry was quite sure then that she was fibbing, — “and that it was so pleasant! Edouard is very much attached to Julie; very much. Though, of course, all that was mere nonsense; just lies told by that wicked lord. Bah! what did he know?” Harry by this time was beginning to wish that he had never found his way to Mount Street.

"Of course they were lies," he said roughly.

"Of course, *mon cher*. Those things always are lies, and so wicked! What good do they do?"

"Lies never do any good," said Harry.

To so wide a proposition as this madame was not prepared to give an unconditional assent; she therefore shrugged her shoulders and once again looked like her brother.

"Ah!" she said. "Julie is a happy woman now. Seven — thousand — pounds a year! One does not know how to believe it; does one?"

"I never heard the amount of her income," said Harry.

"It is all that," said the Franco-Pole, energetically, "every franc of it, besides the house! I know it. She told me herself. Yes. What woman would risk that, you know? and his life, you may say, as good as gone? Of course they were lies."

"I don't think you understand her, Madame Gordeloup."

"Oh, yes; I know her, so well. And love her — oh, Mr. Clavering, I love her so dearly! Is she not charming? So beautiful you know, and grand. Such a will, too! That is what I like in a woman. Such a courage! She never flinched in those horrid days, never. And when he called her, — you know what, — she only looked at him, just looked at him, miserable object. Oh, it was beautiful!" And Madame Gordeloup, rising in her energy from her seat for the purpose, strove to throw upon Harry such another glance as the injured, insulted wife had thrown upon her foul-tongued, dying lord.

"She will marry," said Madame Gordeloup, chang-

ing her tone with a suddenness that made Harry start; "yes, she will marry of course. Your English widows always marry if they have money. They are wrong, and she will be wrong; but she will marry."

"I do not know how that may be," said Harry, looking foolish.

"I tell you I know she will marry, Mr. Clavering; I told Edouard so yesterday. He merely smiled. It would hardly do for him, she has so much will. Edouard has a will also."

"All men have, I suppose."

"Ah, yes; but there is a difference. A sum of money down, if a man is to marry, is better than a widow's dower. If she dies, you know, he looks so foolish. And she is grand and will want to spend everything. Is she much older than you, Mr. Clavering? Of course I know Julie's age, though perhaps you do not. What will you give me to tell?" And the woman leered at him with a smile which made Harry think that she was almost more than mortal. He found himself quite unable to cope with her in conversation, and soon after this got up to take his leave. "You will come again?" she said. "Do. I like you so much. And when Julie is in town, we shall be able to see her together, and I will be your friend. Believe me."

Harry was very far from believing her, and did not in the least require her friendship. Her friendship, indeed! How could any decent English man or woman wish for the friendship of such a creature as that? It was thus that he thought of her as he walked away from Mount Street, making heavy accusations, within his own breast, against Lady Ongar as he did so. Julia! He repeated the name over to himself a dozen

times, thinking that the flavour of it was lost since it had been contaminated so often by that vile tongue. But what concern was it of his? Let her be Julia to whom she would, she could never be Julia again to him. But she was his friend — Lady Ongar, and he told himself plainly that his friend had been wrong in having permitted herself to hold any intimacy with such a woman as that. No doubt Lady Ongar had been subjected to very trying troubles in the last months of her husband's life, but no circumstances could justify her, if she continued to endorse the false cordiality of that horribly vulgar and evil-minded little woman. As regarded the grave charges brought against Lady Ongar, Harry still gave no credit to them, still looked upon them as calumnies, in spite of the damning advocacy of Sophie and her brother; but he felt that she must have dabbled in very dirty water to have returned to England with such claimants on her friendship as these. He had not much admired the count, but the count's sister had been odious to him. "I will be your friend. Believe me." Harry Clavering stamped upon the pavement as he thought of the little Pole's offer to him. She be his friend! No, indeed; — not if there were no other friend for him in all London.

Sophie, too, had her thoughts about him. Sophie was very anxious in this matter, and was resolved to stick as close to her Julie as possible. "I will be his friend or his enemy; — let him choose." That had been Sophie's reflection on the matter when she was left alone.

CHAPTER XV.

An Evening in Bolton Street.

TEN days after his visit in Mount Street, Harry received the note which Lady Ongar had written to him on the night of her arrival in London. It was brought to Mr. Beilby's office by her own footman early in the morning; but Harry was there at the time, and was thus able to answer it, telling Lady Ongar that he would come as she had desired. She had commenced her letter "Dear Harry," and he well remembered that when she had before written she had called him "Dear Mr. Clavering." And though the note contained only half-a-dozen ordinary words, it seemed to him to be affectionate, and almost loving. Had she not been eager to see him, she would hardly thus have written to him on the very instant of her return. "Dear Lady Ongar," he wrote, "I shall dine at my club, and be with you about eight. Yours always, H. C." After that he could hardly bring himself to work satisfactorily during the whole day. Since his interview with the Franco-Polish lady he had thought a good deal about himself, and had resolved to work harder and to love Florence Burton more devotedly than ever. The nasty little woman had said certain words to him which had caused him to look into his own breast and to tell himself that this was necessary. As the love was easier than the work, he began his new tasks on the following morning by writing a long and very affectionate letter to his own Flo, who was still staying at Clavering rectory; — a letter so long and so affectionate that Florence, in her ecstasy of delight made Fanny read it, and confess that, as a love-letter, it was perfect.

"It's great nonsense, all the same," said Fanny.

"It isn't nonsense at all," said Florence; "and if it were, it would not signify. Is it true? That's the question."

"I'm sure it's true," said Fanny.

"And so am I," said Florence. "I don't want any one to tell me that."

"Then why did you ask, you simpleton?" Florence indeed was having a happy time of it at Clavering rectory. When Fanny called her a simpleton, she threw her arms round Fanny's neck and kissed her.

And Harry kept his resolve about the work too, investigating plans with a resolution to understand them which was almost successful. During those days he would remain at his office till past four o'clock, and would then walk away with Theodore Burton, dining sometimes in Onslow Crescent, and going there sometimes in the evening after dinner. And when there he would sit and read; and once when Cecilia essayed to talk to him, he told her to keep her apron-strings to herself. Then Theodore laughed and apologized, and Cecilia said that too much work made Jack a dull boy; and then Theodore laughed again, stretching out his legs and arms as he rested a moment from his own study, and declared that, under those circumstances, Harry never would be dull. And Harry on those evenings would be taken upstairs to see the bairns in their cots; and as he stood with their mother looking down upon the children, pretty words would be said about Florence and his future life; and all was going merry as a marriage bell. But on that morning, when the note had come from Lady Ongar, Harry could work

No more to his satisfaction. He scrawled upon his blotting-paper, and made no progress whatsoever towards the understanding of anything. It was the day on which, in due course, he would write to Florence; and he did write to her. But Florence did not show this letter to Fanny, claiming for it any meed of god-like perfection. It was a stupid, short letter, in which he declared that he was very busy, and that his head ached. In a postscript he told her that he was going to see Lady Ongar that evening. This he communicated to her under an idea that by doing so he made everything right. And I think that the telling of it did relieve his conscience.

He left the office soon after three, having brought himself to believe in the headache, and sauntered down to his club. He found men playing whist there, and as whist might be good for his head, he joined them. They won his money, and scolded him for playing badly till he was angry, and then he went out for a walk by himself. As he went along Piccadilly he saw Sophie Gordeloup coming towards him, trotting along, with her dress held well up over her ankles, eager, quick, and, as he said to himself, clearly intent upon some mischief. He endeavoured to avoid her by turning up the Burlington Arcade, but she was too quick for him, and was walking up the arcade by his side before he had been able to make up his mind as to the best mode of ridding himself of such a companion.

"Ah, Mr. Clavering, I am so glad to see you. I was with Julie last night. She was fagged, very much fagged — the journey, you know, and the business. But yet so handsome! And we talked of you. Yes, Mr. Clavering; and I told her how good you had been

in coming to me. She said you were always good; yes, she did. When shall you see her?"

Harry Clavering was a bad hand at fibbing, and a bad hand also at leaving a question unanswered. When questioned in this way he did not know what to do but to answer the truth. He would much rather not have said that he was going to Bolton Street that evening, but he could find no alternative. "I believe I shall see her this evening," he said, simply venturing to mitigate the evil of making the communication by rendering it falsely doubtful. There are men who fib with so bad a grace and with so little tact that they might as well not fib at all. They not only never arrive at success, but never even venture to expect it.

"Ah, this evening. Let me see. I don't think I can be there to-night. Madame Berenstoff receives at the embassy."

"Good afternoon," said Harry, turning into Truefit's, the hairdresser's shop.

"Ah, very well," said Sophie to herself; "just so. It will be better, much better. He is simply one lout, and why should he have it all? My God, what fools, what louts, are these Englishmen!" Now having read Sophie's thoughts so far, we will leave her to walk up the remainder of the arcade by herself.

I do not know that Harry's visit to Truefit's establishment had been in any degree caused by his engagement for the evening. I fancy that he had simply taken to ground at the first hole, as does a hunted fox. But now that he was there he had his head put in order, and thought that he looked the better for the operation. He then went back to his club, and when he sauntered into the card-room one

old gentleman looked askance at him, as though inquiring angrily whether he had come there to make fresh misery. "Thank you; no, — I won't play again," said Harry. Then the old gentleman was appeased, and offered him a pinch of snuff. "Have you seen the new book about whist?" said the old gentleman. "It is very useful, — very useful. I'll send you a copy if you will allow me." Then Harry left the room, and went down to dinner.

It was a little past eight when he knocked at Lady Ongar's door. I fear he had calculated that if he were punctual to the moment, she would think that he thought the matter to be important. It was important to him, and he was willing that she should know that it was so. But there are degrees in everything, and therefore he was twenty minutes late. He was not the first man who has weighed the diplomatic advantage of being after his time. But all those ideas went from him at once when she met him almost at the door of the room, and, taking him by the hand, said that she was "so glad to see him, — so very glad. Fancy, Harry, I haven't seen an old friend since I saw you last. You don't know how hard all that seems."

"It is hard," said he; and when he felt the pressure of her hand, and saw the brightness of her eye, and when her dress rustled against him as he followed her to her seat, and he became sensible of the influence of her presence, all his diplomacy vanished, and he was simply desirous of devoting himself to her service. Of course, any such devotion was to be given without detriment to that other devotion which he owed to Florence Burton. But this stipulation, though it was made, was made quickly, and with a confused brain.

"Yes, — it is hard," she said. "Harry, sometimes I think I shall go mad. It is more than I can bear. I could bear it if it hadn't been my own fault, — all my own fault."

There was a suddenness about this which took him quite by surprise. No doubt it had been her own fault. He also had told himself that; though, of course, he would make no such charge to her. "You have not recovered yet," he said, "from what you have suffered lately. Things will look brighter to you after a while."

"Will they? Ah, — I do not know. But come, Harry; come and sit down, and let me get you some tea. There is no harm, I suppose, in having you here, — is there?"

"Harm, Lady Ongar?"

"Yes, — harm, Lady Ongar." As she repeated her own name after him, nearly in his tone, she smiled once again; and then she looked as she used to look in the old days, when she would be merry with him. "It is hard to know what a woman may do, and what she may not. When my husband was ill and dying, I never left his bedside. From the moment of my marrying him till his death, I hardly spoke to a man but in his presence; and when once I did, it was he that had sent him. And for all that people have turned their backs upon me. You and I were old friends, Harry, and something more once, — were we not? But I jilted you, as you were man enough to tell me. How I did respect you when you dared to speak the truth to me! Men don't know women, or they would be harder to them."

"I did not mean to be hard to you."

"If you had taken me by the shoulders and shaken me, and have declared that before God you would not allow such wickedness, I should have obeyed you. I know I should." Harry thought of Florence, and could not bring himself to say that he wished it had been so. "But where would you have been then, Harry? I was wrong and false and a beast to marry that man; but I should not, therefore, have been right to marry you and ruin you. It would have been ruin, you know, and we should simply have been fools."

"The folly was very pleasant," said he.

"Yes, yes; I will not deny that. But then the wisdom and the prudence afterwards! Oh, Harry, that was not pleasant. That was not pleasant! But what was I saying? Oh! about the propriety of your being here. It is so hard to know what is proper. As I have been married, I suppose I may receive whom I please. Is not that the law?"

"You may receive me, I should think. Your sister is my cousin's wife." Harry's matter-of-fact argument did as well as anything else, for it turned her thought at the moment.

"My sister, Harry! If there was nothing to make us friends but our connection through Sir Hugh Clavering, I do not know that I should be particularly anxious to see you. How unmanly he has been, and how cruel!"

"Very cruel," said Harry. Then he thought of Archie and Archie's suit. "But he is willing to change all that now. Hermione asked me the other day to persuade you to go to Clavering."

"And have you come here to use your eloquence

for that purpose? I will never go to Clavering again, Harry, unless it should be yours, and your wife should offer to receive me. Then I'd pack up for the dear, dull, solemn old place, though I was on the other side of Europe."

"It will never be mine."

"Probably not, and probably, therefore, I shall never be there again. No; I can forgive an injury, but not an insult, — not an insult such as that. I will not go to Clavering; so, Harry, you may save your eloquence. Hermione I shall be glad to see whenever she will come to me. If you can persuade her to that, you will persuade her to a charity."

"She goes nowhere, I think, without his — his —"

"Without his permission. Of course she does not. That, I suppose, is all as it should be. And he is such a tyrant that he will give no such permission. He would tell her, I suppose, that her sister was no fit companion for her."

"He could not say that now, as he has asked you there."

"Ah, I don't know that. He would say one thing first and another after, just as it would suit him. He has some object in wishing that I should go there, I suppose." Harry, who knew the object, and who was too faithful to betray Lady Clavering, even though he was altogether hostile to his cousin Archie's suit, felt a little proud of his position, but said nothing in answer to this. "But I shall not go; nor will I see him, or go to his house when he comes up to London. When do they come, Harry?"

"He is in town now."

"What a nice husband, is he not? And when does Hermione come?"

"I do not know; she did not say. Little Hughy is ill, and that may keep her."

"After all, Harry, I may have to pack up and go to Clavering even yet, — that is, if the mistress of the house will have me."

"Never in the way you mean, Lady Ongar. Do not propose to kill all my relations in order that I might have their property. Archie intends to marry, and have a dozen children."

"Archie marry! Who will have him? But such men as he are often in the way by marrying some cookmaid at last. Archie is Hugh's body-slave. Fancy being body-slave to Hugh Clavering! He has two, and poor Hermy is the other; only he prefers not to have Hermy near him, which is lucky for her. Here is some tea. Let us sit down and be comfortable, and talk no more about our horrid relations. I don't know what made me speak of them. I did not mean it."

Harry sat down and took the cup from her hand, as she had bidden the servant to leave the tray upon the table.

"So you saw Count Pateroff?" she said.

"Yes, and his sister."

"So she told me. What do you think of them?" To this question Harry made no immediate answer. "You may speak out. Though I lived abroad with such as them for twelve months, I have not forgotten the sweet scent of our English hedgerows, nor the wholesomeness of English household manners. What do you think of them?"

"They are not sweet or wholesome," said he.

"Oh, Harry, you are so honest! Your honesty is beautiful. A spade will ever be a spade with you."

He thought that she was laughing at him, and coloured.

"You pressed me to speak," he said, "and I did but use your own words."

"Yes, but you used them with such straightforward violence! Well, you shall use what words you please, and how you please, because a word of truth is so pleasant after living in a world of lies. I know you will not lie to me, Harry. You never did."

He felt that now was the moment in which he should tell her of his engagement, but he let the moment pass without using it. And, indeed, it would have been hard for him to tell. In telling such a story he would have been cautioning her that it was useless for her to love him, — and this he could not bring himself to do. And he was not sure even now that she had not learned the fact from her sister. "I hope not," he said. In all that he was saying he knew that his words were tame and impotent in comparison with hers, which seemed to him to mean so much. But then his position was so unfortunate! Had it not been for Florence Burton he would have been long since at her feet; for, to give Harry Clavering his due, he could be quick enough at swearing to a passion. He was one of those men to whom love-making comes so readily that it is a pity that they should ever marry. He was ever making love to women, usually meaning no harm. He made love to Cecilia Burton over her children's beds, and that discreet matron liked it. But it was a love-making without danger. It

simply signified on his part the pleasure he had in being on good terms with a pretty woman. He would have liked to have made love in the same way to Lady Ongar; but that was impossible, and in all love-making with Lady Ongar there must be danger. There was a pause after the expression of his last hopes, during which he finished his tea, and then looked at his boots.

"You do not ask me what I have been doing at my country-house."

"And what have you been doing there?"

"Hating it."

"That is wrong."

"Everything is wrong that I do; everything must be wrong. That is the nature of the curse upon me."

"You think too much of all that now."

"Ah, Harry, that is so easily said. People do not think of such things if they can help themselves. The place is full of him and his memories; full of him, though I do not as yet know whether he ever put his foot in it. Do you know I have a plan, a scheme, which would, I think, make me happy for one half-hour? It is to give everything back to the family. Everything! money, house, and name; to call myself Julia Brabazon, and let the world call me what it pleases. Then I would walk out into the streets, and beg some one to give me my bread. Is there one in all the wide world that would give me a crust? Is there one, except yourself, Harry — one, except yourself?"

Poor Florence! I fear it fared badly with her cause at this moment. How was it possible that he should

not regret, that he should not look back upon Stratton with something akin to sorrow? Julia had been his first love, and to her he could have been always true. I fear he thought of this now. I fear that it was a grief to him that he could not place himself close at her side, bid her do as she had planned, and then come to him, and share all his crusts. Had it been open to him to play that part, he would have played it well, and would have gloried in the thoughts of her poverty. The position would have suited him exactly. But Florence was in the way, and he could not do it. How was he to answer Lady Ongar? It was more difficult now than ever to tell her of Florence Burton.

His eyes were full of tears, and she accepted that as his excuse for not answering her. "I suppose they would say that I was a romantic fool. When the price has been taken one cannot cleanse oneself of the stain. With Judas, you know, it was not sufficient that he gave back the money. Life was too heavy for him, and so he went out and hanged himself."

"Julia," he said, getting up from his chair, and going over to where she sat on a sofa, "Julia, it is horrid to hear you speak of yourself in that way. I will not have it. You are not such a one as the Iscariot." And as he spoke to her, he found her hand in his.

"I wish you had my burden, Harry, for one half day, so that you might know its weight."

"I wish I could bear it for you — for life."

"To be always alone, Harry; to have none that come to me and scold me, and love me, and sometimes make me smile! You will scold me at any rate;

will you not? It is terrible to have no one near one that will speak to one with the old easiness of familiar affection. And then the pretence of it where it does not, cannot, could not, exist! Oh, that woman, Harry; — that woman who comes here and calls me Julie! And she has got me to promise too that I would call her Sophie! I know that you despise me because she comes here. Yes; I can see it. You said at once that she was not wholesome, with your dear outspoken honesty."

"It was your word."

"And she is not wholesome, whosever word it was. She was there, hanging about him when he was so bad, before the worst came. She read novels to him, — books that I never saw, and played *écarté* with him for what she called gloves. I believe in my heart she was spying me, and I let her come and go as she would, because I would not seem to be afraid of her. So it grew. And once or twice she was useful to me. A woman, Harry, wants to have a woman near her sometimes, — even though it be such an unwholesome creature as Sophie Gordeloup. You must not think too badly of me on her account."

"I will not; — I will not think badly of you at all."

"He is better, is he not? I know little of him, or nothing, but he has a more reputable outside than she has. Indeed I liked him. He had known Lord Ongar well; and though he did not toady him nor was afraid of him, yet he was gentle and considerate. Once to me he said words that I was called on to resent; — but he never repeated them, and I know that he was prompted by him who should have protected me. It

is too bad, Harry, is it not? Too bad almost to be believed by such as you."

"It is very bad," said Harry.

"After that he was always courteous; and when the end came and things were very terrible, he behaved well and kindly. He went in and out quietly, and like an old friend. He paid for everything, and was useful. I know that even this made people talk; — yes, Harry, even at such a moment as that! But in spite of the talking I did better with him than I could have done without him."

"He looks like a man who could be kind if he chooses."

"He is one of those, Harry, who find it easy to be good-natured, and who are soft by nature, as cats are, — not from their heart, but through instinctive propensity to softness. When it suits them, they scratch, even though they have been ever so soft before. Count Pateroff is a cat. You, Harry, I think are a dog." She perhaps expected that he would promise to her that he would be her dog, — a dog in constancy and affection; but he was still mindful in part of Florence, and restrained himself.

"I must tell you something further," she said. "And indeed it is this that I particularly want to tell you. I have not seen him, you know, since I parted with him at Florence."

"I did not know," said Harry.

"I thought I had told you. However, so it is. And now, listen. He came down to Ongar Park the other day while I was there, and sent in his card. When I refused to receive him, he wrote to me pressing his visit. I still declined, and he wrote again.

I burned his note, because I did not choose that anything from him should be in my possession. He told some story about papers of Lord Ongar. I have nothing to do with Lord Ongar's papers. Everything of which I knew was sealed up in the count's presence and in mine, and was sent to the lawyers for the executors. I looked at nothing; not at one word in a single letter. What could he have to say to me of Lord Ongar's papers?"

"Or he might have written."

"At any rate he should not have come there, Harry. I would not see him, nor, if I can help it, will I see him here. I will be open with you, Harry. I think that perhaps it might suit him to make me his wife. Such an arrangement, however, would not suit me. I am not going to be frightened into marrying a man, because he has been falsely called my lover. If I cannot escape the calumny in any other way, I will not escape it in that way."

"Has he said anything?"

"No; not a word. I have not seen him since the day after Lord Ongar's funeral. But I have seen his sister."

"And has she proposed such a thing?"

"No, she has not proposed it. But she talks of it, saying that it would not do. Then, when I tell her that of course it would not do, she shows me all that would make it expedient. She is so sly and so false, that with all my eyes open I cannot quite understand her, or quite know what she is doing. I do not feel sure that she wishes it herself."

"She told me that it would not do."

"She did, did she? If she speaks of it again,

tell her that she is right, that it will never do. Had he not come down to Ongar Park, I should not have mentioned this to you. I should not have thought that he had in truth any such scheme in his head. He did not tell you that he had been there?"

"He did not mention it. Indeed, he said very little about you at all."

"No, he would not. He is cautious. He never talks of anybody to anybody. He speaks only of the outward things of the world. Now, Harry, what you must do for me is this." As she was speaking to him she was leaning again upon the table, with her forehead resting upon her hands. Her small widow's cap had become thus thrust back, and was now nearly off her head, so that her rich brown hair was to be seen in its full luxuriance, rich and lovely as it had ever been. Could it be that she felt, — half thought, half felt, without knowing that she thought it, — that while the signs of her widowhood were about her, telling in their too plain language the tale of what she had been, he could not dare to speak to her of his love? She was indeed a widow, but not as are other widows. She had confessed, did hourly confess to herself, the guilt which she had committed in marrying that man; but the very fact of such confessions, of such acknowledgment, absolved her from the necessity of any show of sorrow. When she declared how she had despised and hated her late lord, she threw off mentally all her weeds. Mourning, the appearance even of mourning, became impossible to her, and the cap upon her head was declared openly to be a sacrifice to the world's requirements. It was now pushed back, but I fancy that nothing like a thought on the matter

had made itself plain to her mind. "What you must do for me is this," she continued. "You must see Count Pateroff again, and tell him from me, — as my friend, — that I cannot consent to see him. Tell him that if he will think of it, he must know the reason why."

"Of course he will know."

"Tell him what I say, all the same; and tell him that as I have hitherto had cause to be grateful to him for his kindness, so also I hope he will not put an end to that feeling by anything now that would not be kind. If there be papers of Lord Ongar's, he can take them either to my lawyers, if that be fit, or to those of the family. You can tell him that, can you not?"

"Oh, yes; I can tell him."

"And have you any objection?"

"None for myself. The question is, — would it not come better from some one else?"

"Because you are a young man, you mean? Whom else can I trust, Harry? To whom can I go? Would you have me ask Hugh to do this? Or, perhaps you think Archie Clavering would be a proper messenger. Who else have I got?"

"Would not his sister be better?"

"How should I know that she had told him? She would tell him her own story, — what she herself wished. And whatever story she told, he would not believe it. They know each other better than you and I know them. It must be you, Harry, if you will do it."

"Of course I will do it. I will try and see him to-morrow. Where does he live?"

"How should I know? Perhaps nobody knows; no one, perhaps, of all those with whom he associates constantly. They do not live after our fashion, do they, these foreigners? But you will find him at his club, or hear of him at the house in Mount Street. You will do it; eh, Harry?"

"I will."

"That is my good Harry. But I suppose you would do anything I asked you. Ah, well; it is good to have one friend, if one has no more. Look, Harry! if it is not near eleven o'clock! Did you know that you had been here nearly three hours? And I have given you nothing but a cup of tea!"

"What else do you think I have wanted?"

"At your club you would have had cigars and brandy-and-water, and billiards, and broiled bones, and oysters, and tankards of beer. I know all about it. You have been very patient with me. If you go quick perhaps you will not be too late for the tankards and the oysters."

"I never have any tankards or any oysters."

"Then it is cigars and brandy-and-water. Go quick, and perhaps you may not be too late."

"I will go, but not there. One cannot change one's thoughts so suddenly."

"Go, then; and do not change your thoughts. Go and think of me, and pity me. Pity me for what I have got, but pity me most for what I have lost." Harry did not say another word, but took her hand, and kissed it, and then left her.

Pity her for what she had lost! What had she lost? What did she mean by that? He knew well what she meant by pitying her for what she had got.

What had she lost? She had lost him. Did she intend to evoke his pity for that loss? She had lost him. Yes, indeed. Whether or no the loss was one to regret, he would not say to himself; or rather, he, of course, declared that it was not; but such as it was, it had been incurred. He was now the property of Florence Burton, and, whatever happened, he would be true to her.

Perhaps he pitied himself also. If so, it is to be hoped that Florence may never know of such pity. Before he went to bed, when he was praying on his knees, he inserted it in his prayers that the God in whom he believed might make him true in his faith to Florence Burton.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Rivals.

LADY ONGAR sat alone, long into the night, when Harry Clavering had left her. She sat there long, getting up occasionally from her seat, once or twice attempting to write at her desk, looking now and then at a paper or two, and then at a small picture which she had, but passing the long hours in thinking, — in long, sad, solitary thoughts. What should she do with herself, — with herself, her title, and her money? Would it be still well that she should do something, that she should make some attempt; or should she, in truth, abandon all, as the arch-traitor did, and acknowledge that for her foot there could no longer be a resting-place on the earth? At six-and-twenty, with youth, beauty, and wealth at her command, must she despair? But her youth had been stained, her beauty

had lost its freshness; and as for her wealth, had she not stolen it? Did not the weight of the theft sit so heavy on her, that her brightest thought was one which prompted her to abandon it?

As to that idea of giving up her income and her house and calling herself again Julia Brabazon, though there was something in the poetry of it which would now and again for half-an-hour relieve her, yet she hardly proposed such a course to herself as a reality. The world in which she had lived had taught her to laugh at romance, to laugh at it even while she liked its beauty; and she would tell herself that for such a one as her to do such a thing as this, would be to insure for herself the ridicule of all who knew her name. What would Sir Hugh say, and her sister? What Count Pateroff and the faithful Sophie? What all the Ongar tribe, who would reap the rich harvest of her insanity? These latter would offer to provide her a place in some convenient asylum, and the others would all agree that such would be her fitting destiny. She could bear the idea of walking forth, as she had said, penniless into the street, without a crust; but she could not bear the idea of being laughed at when she got there.

To her, in her position, her only escape was by marriage. It was the solitude of her position which maddened her; — its solitude, or the necessity of breaking that solitude by the presence of those who were odious to her. Whether it were better to be alone, feeding on the bitterness of her own thoughts, or to be comforted by the fulsome flatteries and odious falsenesses of Sophie Gordeloup, she could not tell. She hated herself for her loneliness, but she hated her-

self almost worse for submitting herself to the society of Sophie Gordeloup. Why not give all that she possessed to Harry Clavering, — herself, her income, her rich pastures and horses and oxen, and try whether the world would not be better to her when she had done so?

She had learned to laugh at romance, but still she believed in love. While that bargain was going on as to her settlement, she had laughed at romance, and had told herself that in this world worldly prosperity was everything. Sir Hugh then had stood by her with truth, for he had well understood the matter, and could enter into it with zest. Lord Ongar, in his state of health, had not been in a position to make close stipulations as to the dower in the event of his proposed wife becoming a widow. "No, no; we won't stand that," Sir Hugh had said to the lawyers. "We all hope, of course, that Lord Ongar may live long; no doubt he'll turn over a new leaf, and die at ninety. But in such a case as this the widow must not be fettered." The widow had not been fettered, and Julia had been made to understand the full advantage of such an arrangement. But still she had believed in love when she had bid farewell to Harry in the garden. She had told herself then, even then, that she would have better liked to have taken him and his love, — if only she could have afforded it. He had not dreamed that on leaving him she had gone from him to her room, and taken out his picture, — the same that she had with her now in Bolton Street, — and had kissed it, bidding him farewell there with a passion which she could not display in his presence. And she had thought of his offer about the money over and over

again. "Yes," she would say; "that man loved me. He would have given me all he had to relieve me, though nothing was to come to him in return." She had, at any rate, been loved once; and she almost wished that she had taken the money, that she might now have an opportunity of repaying it.

And she was again free, and her old lover was again by her side. Had that fatal episode in her life been so fatal that she must now regard herself as tainted and unfit for him? There was no longer anything to separate them, — anything of which she was aware, unless it was that. And as for his love, — did he not look and speak as though he loved her still? Had he not pressed her hand passionately, and kissed it, and once more called her Julia? How should it be that he should not love her? In such a case as his, love might have been turned to hatred or to enmity; but it was not so with him. He called himself her friend. How could there be friendship between them without love?

And then she thought how much with her wealth she might do for him. With all his early studies and his talent, Harry Clavinger was not the man, she thought, to make his way in the world by hard work; but with such an income as she could give him, he might shine among the proud ones of his nation. He should go into Parliament, and do great things. He should be lord of all. It should all be his without a word of reserve. She had been mercenary once, but she would atone for that now by open-handed, undoubting generosity. She herself had learned to hate the house and fields and widespread comforts of Ongar Park. She had walked among it all alone, and despised.

But it would be a glory to her to see him go forth, with Giles at his heels, boldly giving his orders, changing this and improving that. He would be rebuked for no errors, let him do with Enoch Gubby and the rest of them what he pleased! And then the parson's wife would be glad enough to come to her, and the house would be full of smiling faces. And it might be that God would be good to her, and that she would have treasures, as other women had them, and that the flavour would come back to the apples, and that the ashes would cease to grate between her teeth.

She loved him, and why should it not be so? She could go before God's altar with him without disgracing herself with a lie. She could put her hand in his, and swear honestly that she would worship him and obey him. She had been dishonest; — but if he would pardon her for that, could she not reward him richly for such pardon? And it seemed to her that he had pardoned her. He had forgiven it all and was gracious to her, — coming at her beck and call, and sitting with her as though he liked her presence. She was woman enough to understand this, and she knew that he liked it. Of course he loved her. How could it be otherwise?

But yet he spoke nothing to her of his love. In the old days there had been with him no bashfulness of that kind. He was not a man to tremble and doubt before a woman. In those old days he had been ready enough, — so ready, that she had wondered that one who had just come from his books should know so well how to make himself master of a girl's heart. Nature had given him that art, as she does give it to some, withholding it from many. But now he sat

near her, dropping once and again half words of love, hearing her references to the old times; — and yet he said nothing.

But how was he to speak of love to one who was a widow but of four months' standing? and with what face could he now again ask for her hand, knowing that it had been filled so full since last it was refused to him? It was thus she argued to herself when she excused him in that he did not speak to her. As to her widowhood, to herself it was a thing of scorn. Thinking of it, she cast her weepers from her, and walked about the room, scorning the hypocrisy of her dress. It needed that she should submit herself to this hypocrisy before the world; but he might know, — for had she not told him? — that the clothes she wore were no index of her feeling or of her heart. She had been mean enough, base enough, vile enough, to sell herself to that wretched lord. Mean, base, and vile she had been, and she now confessed it; but she was not false enough to pretend that she mourned the man as a wife mourns. Harry might have seen enough to know, have understood enough to perceive, that he need not regard her widowhood.

And as to her money! If that were the stumbling-block, might it not be well that the first overture should come from her? Could she not find words to tell him that it might all be his? Could she not say to him, "Harry Clavering, all this is nothing in my hands. Take it into your hands, and it will prosper." Then it was that she went to her desk, and attempted to write to him. She did write to him a completed note, offering herself and all that was hers for his acceptance. In doing so, she strove hard to be honest

and yet not over bold; to be affectionate and yet not unfeminine. Long she sat, holding her head with one hand, while the other attempted to use the pen which would not move over the paper. At length, quickly it flew across the sheet, and a few lines were there for her to peruse.

"Harry Clavering," she had written, "I know I am doing what men and women say no woman should do. You may, perhaps, say so of me now; but if you do, I know you so well, that I do not fear that others will be able to repeat it. Harry, I have never loved any one but you. Will you be my husband? You well know that I should not make you this offer, if I did not intend that everything I have should be yours. It will be pleasant to me to feel that I can make some reparation for the evil I have done. As for love, I have never loved any one but you. You yourself must know that well. Yours, altogether if you will have it so, — JULIA."

She took the letter with her, back across the room to her seat by the fire, and took with her at the same time the little portrait; and there she sat, looking at the one and reading the other. At last she slowly folded the note up into a thin wisp of paper, and, lighting the end of it, watched it till every shred of it was burnt to an ash. "If he wants me," she said, "he can come and take me, — as other men do." It was a fearful attempt, that which she had thought of making. How could she have looked him in the face again had his answer to her been a refusal?

Another hour went by before she took herself to her bed, during which her cruelly-used maiden was waiting for her half asleep in the chamber above; and

during that time she tried to bring herself to some steady resolve. She would remain in London for the coming months, so that he might come to her if he pleased. She would remain there, even though she were subject to the daily attacks of Sophie Gordeloup. She hardly knew why, but in part she was afraid of Sophie. She had done nothing of which Sophie knew the secret. She had no cause to tremble because Sophie might be offended. The woman had seen her in some of her saddest moments, and could indeed tell of indignities which would have killed some women. But these she had borne, and had not disgraced herself in the bearing of them. But still she was afraid of Sophie, and felt that she could not bring herself absolutely to dismiss her friend from her house. Nevertheless, she would remain; — because Harry Clavering was in London and could come to her there. To her house at Ongar Park she would never go again, unless she went as his wife. The place had become odious to her. Bad as was her solitude in London, with Sophie Gordeloup to break it, — and perhaps with Sophie's brother to attack her, it was not so bad as the silent desolation of Ongar Park. Never again would she go there, unless she went there in triumph, — as Harry's wife. Having so far resolved she took herself at last to her room, and dismissed her drowsy Phœbe to her rest.

And now the reader must be asked to travel down at once into the country, that he may see how Florence Burton passed the same evening at Clavering rectory. It was Florence's last night there, and on the following morning she was to return to her father's house at Stratton. Florence had not as yet received her un-

satisfactory letter from Harry. That was to arrive on the following morning. At present she was, as regarded her letters, under the influence of that one which had been satisfactory in so especial a degree. Not that the coming letter, — the one now on its route, — was of a nature to disturb her comfort permanently, or to make her in any degree unhappy. "Dear fellow; he must be careful, he is overworking himself." Even the unsatisfactory letter would produce nothing worse than this from her; but now, at the moment of which I am writing, she was in a paradise of happy thoughts.

Her visit to Clavering had been in every respect successful. She had been liked by every one, and every one in return had been liked by her. Mrs. Clavering had treated her as though she were a daughter. The rector had made her pretty presents, had kissed her, and called her his child. With Fanny she had formed a friendship which was to endure for ever, let destiny separate them how it might. Dear Fanny! She had had a wonderful interview respecting Fanny on this very day, and was at this moment disquieting her mind because she could not tell her friend what had happened without a breach of confidence! She had learned a great deal at Clavering, though in most matters of learning she was a better instructed woman than they were whom she had met. In general knowledge and in intellect she was Fanny's superior, though Fanny Clavering was no fool; but Florence, when she came thither, had lacked something which living in such a house had given to her; — or, I should rather say, something had been given to her of which she would greatly feel the want, if it could be again taken from her. Her mother was as excellent a woman as

had ever sent forth a family of daughters into the world, and I do not know that any one ever objected to her as being ignorant, or specially vulgar; but the house in Stratton was not like Clavering rectory in the little ways of living, and this Florence Burton had been clever enough to understand. She knew that a sojourn under such a roof, with such a woman as Mrs. Clavering, must make her fitter to be Harry's wife; and, therefore, when they pressed her to come again in the autumn, she said that she thought she would. She could understand, too, that Harry was different in many things from the men who had married her sisters, and she rejoiced that it was so. Poor Florence! Had he been more like them it might have been safer for her.

But we must return for a moment to the wonderful interview which has been mentioned. Florence, during her sojourn at Clavering, had become intimate with Mr. Saul, as well as with Fanny. She had given herself for the time heartily to the schools, and matters had so far progressed with her that Mr. Saul had on one occasion scolded her soundly. "It's a great sign that he thinks well of you," Fanny had said. "It was the only sign he ever gave me, before he spoke to me in that sad strain." On the afternoon of this, her last day at Clavering, she had gone over to Cumberly Green with Fanny, to say farewell to the children, and walked back by herself, as Fanny had not finished her work. When she was still about half a mile from the rectory, she met Mr. Saul, who was on his way out to the Green. "I knew I should meet you," he said, "so that I might say good-by."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Saul, — for I am going in truth to-morrow."

"I wish you were staying. I wish you were going to remain with us. Having you here is very pleasant, and you do more good here, perhaps, than you will elsewhere."

"I will not allow that. You forget that I have a father and mother."

"Yes; and you will have a husband soon."

"No, not soon; some day, perhaps, if all goes well. But I mean to be back here often before that. I mean to be here in October, just for a little visit, if mamma can spare me."

"Miss Burton," he said, speaking in a very serious tone ——. All his tones were serious, but that which he now adopted was more solemn than usual. "I wish to consult you on a certain matter, if you can give me five minutes of your time."

"To consult me, Mr. Saul?"

"Yes, Miss Burton. I am hard pressed at present, and I know no one else of whom I can ask a certain question, if I cannot ask it of you. I think that you will answer me truly, if you answer me at all. I do not think you would flatter me, or tell me an untruth."

"Flatter you! how could I flatter you?"

"By telling me ——; but I must ask you my question first. You and Fanny Clavering are dear friends now. You tell each other everything."

"I do not know," said Florence, doubting as to what she might best say, but guessing something of that which was coming.

"She will have told you, perhaps, that I asked her to be my wife. Did she ever tell you that?" Florence looked into his face for a few moments without an-

swering him, not knowing how to answer such a question. "I know that she has told you," said he. "I can see that it is so."

"She has told me," said Florence.

"Why should she not? How could she be with you so many hours, and not tell you that of which she could hardly fail to have the remembrance often present with her? If I were gone from here, if I were not before her eyes daily, it might be otherwise; but seeing me as she does from day to day, of course she has spoken of me to her friend."

"Yes, Mr. Saul, she has told me of it."

"And now, will you tell me whether I may hope?"

"Mr. Saul!"

"I want you to betray no secret, but I ask you for your advice. Can I hope that she will ever return my love?"

"How am I to answer you?"

"With the truth. Only with the truth."

"I should say that she thinks that you have forgotten it."

"Forgotten it! No, Miss Burton; she cannot think that. Do you believe that men or women can forget such things as that? Can you ever forget her brother? Do you think people ever forget when they have loved? No, I have not forgotten her. I have not forgotten that walk which we had down this lane together. There are things which men never forget." Then he paused for an answer.

Florence was by nature steady and self-collected, and she at once felt that she was bound to be wary before she gave him any answer. She had half fancied once or twice that Fanny thought more of Mr. Saul

than she allowed even herself to know. And Fanny, when she had spoken of the impossibility of such a marriage, had always based the impossibility on the fact that people should not marry without the means of living — a reason which to Florence, with all her prudence, was not sufficient. Fanny might wait, as she also intended to wait. Latterly, too, Fanny had declared more than once to Florence her conviction that Mr. Saul's passion had been a momentary insanity, which had altogether passed away; and in these declarations Florence had half fancied that she discovered some tinge of regret. If it were so, what was she now to say to Mr. Saul?

"You think then, Miss Burton," he continued, "that I have no chance of success? I ask the question because if I felt certain that this was so, — quite certain, I should be wrong to remain here. It has been my first and only parish, and I could not leave it without bitter sorrow. But if I were to remain here hopelessly, I should become unfit for my work. I am becoming so, and shall be better away."

"But why ask me, Mr. Saul?"

"Because I think that you can tell me."

"But why not ask herself? Who can tell you so truly as she can do?"

"You would not advise me to do that if you were sure that she would reject me?"

"That is what I would advise."

"I will take your advice, Miss Burton. Now, good-by, and may God bless you. You say you will be here in the autumn; but before the autumn I shall probably have left Clavering. If so, our farewells will be for very long, but I shall always remember our pleasant

intercourse here." Then he went on towards Cumberly Green; and Florence, as she walked into the vicarage grounds, was thinking that no girl had ever been loved by a more single-hearted, pure-minded gentleman than Mr. Saul."

As she sat alone in her bed-room, five or six hours after this interview, she felt some regret that she should leave Clavering without a word to Fanny on the subject. Mr. Saul had exacted no promise of secrecy from her; he was not a man to exact such promises. But she felt not the less that she would be betraying confidence to speak, and it might even be that her speaking on the matter would do more harm than good. Her sympathies were doubtless with Mr. Saul, but she could not therefore say that she thought Fanny ought so accept his love. It would be best to say nothing of the matter, and allow Mr. Saul to fight his own battle.

Then she turned to her own matters, and there she found that everything was pleasant. How good the world had been to her to give her such a lover as Harry Clavering! She owned with all her heart the excellence of being in love, when a girl might be allowed to call such a man her own. She could not but make comparisons between him and Mr. Saul, though she knew that she was making them on points that were hardly worthy of her thoughts. Mr. Saul was plain, uncouth, with little that was bright about him except the brightness of his piety. Harry was like the morning star. He looked and walked and spoke as though he were something more godlike than common men. His very voice created joy, and the ring of his laughter was to Florence as the music of the heavens. What woman would not have loved Harry Clavering?

Even Julia Brabazon, — a creature so base that she had sold herself to such a thing as Lord Ongar for money and a title, but so grand in her gait and ways, so Florence had been told, that she seemed to despise the earth on which she trod, — even she had loved him. Then as Florence thought of what Julia Brabazon might have had and of what she had lost, she wondered that there could be women born so sadly vicious.

But that woman's vice had given her her success, her joy, her great triumph! It was surely not for her to deal hardly with the faults of Julia Brabazon, — for her who was enjoying all the blessings of which those faults had robbed the other! Julia Brabazon had been her very good friend.

But why had this perfect lover come to her, to one so small, so trifling, so little in the world's account as she, and given to her all the treasure of his love? Oh, Harry, — dear Harry! what could she do for him that would be a return good enough for such great goodness? Then she took out his last letter, that satisfactory letter, that letter that had been declared to be perfect, and read it and read it again. No; she did not want Fanny or any one else to tell her that he was true. Honesty and truth were written on every line of his face, were to be heard in every tone of his voice, could be seen in every sentence that came from his hand. Dear Harry; dearest Harry! She knew well that he was true.

Then she also sat down and wrote to him, on that her last night beneath his father's roof, — wrote to him when she had nearly prepared herself for her bed; and honestly, out of her full heart, thanked him for his

love. There was no need that she should be coy with him now, for she was his own. "Dear Harry, when I think of all that you have done for me in loving me and choosing me for your wife, I know that I can never pay you all that I owe you."

Such were the two rival claimants for the hand of Harry Clavering.

CHAPTER XVII.

Let her Know that you're There.

A WEEK had passed since the evening which Harry had spent in Bolton Street, and he had not again seen Lady Ongar. He had professed to himself that his reason for not going there was the non-performance of the commission which Lady Ongar had given him with reference to Count Pateroff. He had not yet succeeded in catching the count, though he had twice asked for him in Mount Street and twice at the club in Pall Mall. It appeared that the count never went to Mount Street, and was very rarely seen at the club. There was some other club which he frequented, and Harry did not know what club. On both the occasions of Harry's calling in Mount Street, the servant had asked him to go up and see madame; but he had declined to do so, pleading that he was hurried. He was, however, driven to resolve that he must go direct to Sophie, as otherwise he could find no means of doing as he had promised. She probably might put him on the scent of her brother.

But there had been another reason why Harry had not gone to Bolton Street, though he had not acknowledged it to himself. He did not dare to trust himself

with Lady Ongar. He feared that he would be led on to betray himself and to betray Florence, — to throw himself at Julia's feet and sacrifice his honesty, in spite of all his resolutions to the contrary. He felt when there as the accustomed but repentant dram-drinker might feel, when, having resolved to abstain, he is called upon to sit with the full glass offered before his lips. From such temptation as that the repentant dram-drinker knows that he must fly. But though he did not go after the fire-water of Bolton Street, neither was he able to satisfy himself with the cool fountain of Onslow Crescent. He was wretched at this time, — ill-satisfied with himself and others, and was no fitting companion for Cecilia Burton. The world, he thought, had used him ill. He could have been true to Julia Brabazon when she was well-nigh penniless. It was not for her money that he had regarded her. Had he been now a free man, — free from those chains with which he had fettered himself at Stratton, he would again have asked this woman for her love, in spite of her past treachery; but it would have been for her love and not for her money that he would have sought her. Was it his fault that he had loved her, that she had been false to him, and that she had now come back and thrown herself before him? Or had he been wrong because he had ventured to think that he loved another when Julia had deserted him? Or could he help himself if he now found that his love in truth belonged to her whom he had known first? The world had been very cruel to him, and he could not go to Onslow Crescent and behave there prettily, hearing the praises of Florence with all the ardour of a discreet lover.

He knew well what would have been his right course, and yet he did not follow it. Let him but once communicate to Lady Ongar the fact of his engagement, and the danger would be over, though much, perhaps, of the misery might remain. Let him write to her and mention the fact, bringing it up as some little immaterial accident, and she would understand what he meant. But this he abstained from doing. Though he swore to himself that he would not touch the dram, he would not dash down the full glass that was held to his lips. He went about the town very wretchedly, looking for the count, and regarding himself as a man specially marked out for sorrow by the cruel hand of misfortune. Lady Ongar, in the meantime, was expecting him, and was waxing angry and becoming bitter towards him because he came not.

Sir Hugh Clavering was now up in London, and with him was his brother Archie. Sir Hugh was a man who strained an income, that was handsome and sufficient for a country gentleman, to the very utmost, wanting to get out of it more than it could be made to give. He was not a man to be in debt, or indulge himself with present pleasures to be paid for out of the funds of future years. He was possessed of a worldly wisdom which kept him from that folly, and taught him to appreciate fully the value of independence. But he was ever remembering how many shillings there are in a pound, and how many pence in a shilling. He had a great eye to discount, and looked very closely into his bills. He searched for cheap shops; — and some men began to say of him that he had found a cheap establishment for such wines as he did not drink himself! In playing cards and in

betting he was very careful, never playing high, never risking much, but hoping to turn something by the end of the year, and angry with himself if he had not done so. An unamiable man he was, but one whose heir would probably not quarrel with him, — if only he would die soon enough. He had always had a house in town, a moderate house in Berkeley Square, which belonged to him and had belonged to his father before him. Lady Clavering had usually lived there during the season; or, as had latterly been the case, during only a part of the season. And now it had come to pass, in this year, that Lady Clavering was not to come to London at all, and that Sir Hugh was meditating whether the house in Berkeley Square might not be let. The arrangement would make the difference of considerably more than a thousand a year to him. For himself, he would take lodgings. He had no idea of giving up London in the spring and early summer. But why keep up a house in Berkeley Square, as Lady Clavering did not use it?

He was partly driven to this by a desire to shake off the burden of his brother. When Archie chose to go to Clavering the house was open to him. That was the necessity of Sir Hugh's position, and he could not avoid it unless he made it worth his while to quarrel with his brother. Archie was obedient, ringing the bell when he was told, looking after the horses, spying about, and perhaps saving as much money as he cost. But the matter was very different in Berkeley Square. No elder brother is bound to find breakfast and bed for a younger brother in London. And yet from his boyhood upwards Archie had made good his footing in Berkeley Square. In the matter of the breakfast, Sir

Hugh had indeed of late got the better of him. The servants were kept on board wages, and there were no household accounts. But there was Archie's room, and Sir Hugh felt this to be a hardship.

The present was not the moment for actually driving forth the intruder, for Archie was now up in London especially under his brother's auspices. And if the business on which Captain Clavering was now intent could be brought to a successful issue, the standing in the world of that young man would be very much altered. Then he would be a brother of whom Sir Hugh might be proud; a brother who would pay his way, and settle his points at whist if he lost them, even to a brother. If Archie could induce Lady Ongar to marry him, he would not be called upon any longer to ring the bells and look after the stable. He would have bells of his own, and stables too, and perhaps some captain of his own to ring them and look after them. The expulsion, therefore, was not to take place till Archie should have made his attempt upon Lady Ongar.

But Sir Hugh would admit of no delay, whereas Archie himself seemed to think that the iron was not yet quite hot enough for striking. It would be better, he had suggested, to postpone the work till Julia could be coaxed down to Clavering in the autumn. He could do the work better, he thought, down at Clavering than in London. But Sir Hugh was altogether of a different opinion. Though he had already asked his sister-in-law to Clavering, when the idea had first come up, he was glad that she had declined the visit. Her coming might be very well if she accepted Archie; but he did not want to be troubled with any renewal of

his responsibility respecting her, if, as was more probable, she should reject him. The world still looked askance at Lady Ongar, and Hugh did not wish to take up the armour of a paladin in her favour. If Archie married her, Archie would be the paladin; though indeed, in that case, no paladin would be needed.

"She has only been a widow, you know, four months," said Archie, pleading for delay. "It won't be delicate; will it?"

"Delicate!" said Sir Hugh. "I don't know whether there is much of delicacy in it at all."

"I don't see why she isn't to be treated like any other woman. If you were to die, you'd think it very odd if any fellow came up to Hermy before the season was over."

"Archie, you are a fool," said Sir Hugh; and Archie could see by his brother's brow that Hugh was angry. "You say things that for folly and absurdity are beyond belief. If you can't see the peculiarities of Julia's position, I am not going to point them out to you."

"She is peculiar, of course, — having so much money, and that place near Guildford, all her own for her life. Of course it's peculiar. But four months, Hugh!"

"If it had been four days it need have made no difference. A home, with some one to support her, is everything to her. If you wait till lots of fellows are buzzing round her you won't have a chance. You'll find that by this time next year she'll be at the top of the fashion; and if not engaged to you, she will be to some one else. I shouldn't be surprised if Harry were after her again."

"He's engaged to that girl we saw down at Clavering."

"What matters that? Engagements can be broken as well as made. You have this great advantage over every one, except him, that you can go to her at once without doing anything out of the way. That girl that Harry has in tow may perhaps keep him away for some time."

"I tell you what, Hugh, you might as well call with me the first time."

"So that I may quarrel with her, which I certainly should do, — or, rather, she with me. No, Archie; if you're afraid to go alone, you'd better give it up."

"Afraid! I'm not afraid!"

"She can't eat you. Remember that with her you needn't stand on your p's and q's, as you would with another woman. She knows what she is about, and will understand what she has to get as well as what she is expected to give. All I can say is, that if she accepts you, Hermy will consent that she shall go to Clavering as much as she pleases till the marriage takes place. It couldn't be done, I suppose, till after a year; and in that case she shall be married at Clavering."

Here was a prospect for Julia Brabazon; — to be led to the same altar at which she had married Lord Ongar, by Archie Clavering, twelve months after her first husband's death, and little more than two years after her first wedding! The peculiarity of the position did not quite make itself apparent either to Hugh or to Archie; but there was one point which did suggest itself to the younger brother at that moment.

"I don't suppose there was anything really wrong, eh?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," said Sir Hugh.

"Because I shouldn't like ——"

"If I were you I wouldn't trouble myself about that. Judge not, that you be not judged."

"Yes, that's true, to be sure," said Archie; and on that point he went forth satisfied.

But the job before him was a peculiar job, and that Archie well knew. In some inexplicable manner he put himself into the scales and weighed himself, and discovered his own weight with fair accuracy. And he put her into the scales, and he found that she was much the heavier of the two. How he did this, — how such men as Archie Clavering do do it, — I cannot say; but they do weigh themselves, and know their own weight, and shove themselves aside as being too light for any real service in the world. This they do, though they may fluster with their voices, and walk about with their noses in the air, and swing their canes, and try to look as large as they may. They do not look large, and they know it; and consequently they ring the bells, and look after the horses, and shove themselves on one side, so that the heavier weights may come forth and do the work. Archie Clavering, who had duly weighed himself, could hardly bring himself to believe that Lady Ongar would be fool enough to marry him! Seven thousand a year, with a park and farm in Surrey, and give it all to him, — him, Archie Clavering, who had, so to say, no weight at all! Archie Clavering, for one, could not bring himself to believe it.

But yet Hermy, her sister, thought it possible; and

though Hermy was, as Archie had found out by his invisible scales, lighter than Julia, still she must know something of her sister's nature. And Hugh, who was by no means light, — who was a man of weight, with money and position and firm ground beneath his feet, — he also thought that it might be so. "Faint heart never won a fair lady," said Archie to himself a dozen times, as he walked down to the Rag. The Rag was his club, and there was a friend there whom he could consult confidentially. No; faint heart never won a fair lady; but they who repeat to themselves that adage, trying thereby to get courage, always have faint hearts for such work. Harry Clavering never thought of the proverb when he went a-wooing.

But Captain Boodle of the Rag, — for Captain Boodle always lived at the Rag when he was not at Newmarket, or at other racecourses, or in the neighbourhood of Market Harborough, — Captain Boodle knew a thing or two, and Captain Boodle, was his fast friend. He would go to Boodle and arrange the campaign with him. Boodle had none of that hectoring, domineering way which Hugh never quite threw off in his intercourse with his brother. And Archie, as he went along, resolved that when Lady Ongar's money was his, and when he had a countess for his wife, he would give his elder brother a cold shoulder.

Boodle was playing pool at the Rag, and Archie joined him; but pool is a game which hardly admits of confidential intercourse as to proposed wives, and Archie was obliged to remain quiet on that subject all the afternoon. He cunningly, however, lost a little money to Boodle, for Boodle liked to win, — and engaged himself to dine at the same table with his

friend. Their dinner they ate almost in silence, — unless when they abused the cook, or made to each other some pithy suggestion as to the expediency of this or that delicacy, — bearing always steadily in view the cost as well as desirability of the viands. Boodle had no shame in not having this or that because it was dear. To dine with the utmost luxury at the smallest expense was a proficiency belonging to him, and of which he was very proud.

But after a while the cloth was gone, and the heads of the two men were brought near together over the small table. Boodle did not speak a word till his brother captain had told his story, had pointed out all the advantages to be gained, explained in what peculiar way the course lay open to himself, and made the whole thing clear to his friend's eye.

"They say she's been a little queer, don't they?" said the friendly counsellor.

"Of course people talk, you know."

"Talk, yes; they're talking a doosed sight, I should say. There's no mistake about the money, I suppose?"

"Oh, none," said Archie, shaking his head vigorously. "Hugh managed all that for her, so I know it."

"She don't lose any of it because she enters herself for running again, does she?"

"Not a shilling. That's the beauty of it."

"Was you ever sweet on her before?"

"What! before Ongar took her? O laws, no. She hadn't a rap, you know; — and knew how to spend money as well as any girl in London."

"It's all to begin then, Clavvy; all the up-hill work to be done?"

"Well, yes; I don't know about up-hill, Doodles. What do you mean by up-hill?"

"I mean that seven thousand a year ain't usually to be picked up merely by trotting easy along the flat. And this sort of work is very up-hill generally, I take it; — unless, you know, a fellow has a fancy for it. If a fellow is really sweet on a girl, he likes it, I suppose."

"She's a doosed handsome woman, you know, Doodles."

"I don't know anything about it, except that I suppose Ongar wouldn't have taken her if she hadn't stood well on her pasterns, and had some breeding about her. I never thought much of her sister, — your brother's wife, you know, — that is in the way of looks. No doubt she runs straight, and that's a great thing. She wont go the wrong side of the post."

"As for running straight, let me alone for that."

"Well, now, Clavvy, I'll tell you what my ideas are. When a man's trying a young filly, his hands can't be too light. A touch too much will bring her on her haunches, or throw her out of her step. She should hardly feel the iron in her mouth. That's the sort of work which requires a man to know well what he's about. But when I've got to do with a trained mare, I always choose that she shall know that I'm there! Do you understand me?"

"Yes; I understand you, Doodles."

"I always choose that she shall know that I'm there." And Captain Boodle, as he repeated these manly words with a firm voice, put out his hands as though he were handling the horse's rein. "Their

mouths are never so fine then, and they generally want to be brought up to the bit, d'ye see? — up to the bit. When a mare has been trained to her work, and knows what she's at in her running, she's all the better for feeling a fellow's hands as she's going. She likes it rather. It gives her confidence, and makes her know where she is. And look here, Clavvy, when she comes to her fences, give her her head; but steady her first, and make her know that you're there. Damme, whatever you do, let her know that you're there. There's nothing like it. She'll think all the more of the fellow that's piloting her. And look here, Clavvy; ride her with spurs. Always ride a trained mare with spurs. Let her know that they're on; and if she tries to get her head, give 'em her. Yes, by George, give 'em her." And Captain Boodle in his energy twisted himself in his chair, and brought his heel round, so that it could be seen by Archie. Then he produced a sharp click with his tongue, and made the peculiar jerk with the muscle of his legs, whereby he was accustomed to evoke the agility of his horses. After that he looked triumphantly at his friend. "Give 'em her, Clavvy, and she'll like you the better for it. She'll know then that you mean it."

It was thus that Captain Boodle instructed his friend Archie Clavering how to woo Lady Ongar; and Archie, as he listened to his friend's words of wisdom, felt that he had learned a great deal. "That's the way I'll do it, Doodles," he said, "and upon my word I'm very much obliged to you."

"That's the way, you may depend on it. Let her know that you're there. — Let her know that you're

there. She's done the filly work before, you see; and it's no good trying that again."

Captain Clavering really believed that he had learned a good deal, and that he now knew the way to set about the work before him. What sort of spurs he was to use, and how he was to put them on, I don't think he did know; but that was a detail as to which he did not think it necessary to consult his adviser. He sat the whole evening in the smoking-room, very silent, drinking slowly iced gin-and-water; and the more he drank the more assured he felt that he now understood the way in which he was to attempt the work before him. "Let her know I'm there," he said to himself, shaking his head gently, so that no one should observe him; "yes, let her know I'm there." At this time Captain Boodle, or Doodles as he was familiarly called, had again ascended to the billiard-room and was hard at work. "Let her know that I'm there," repeated Archie, mentally. Everything was contained in that precept. And he, with his hands before him on his knees, went through the process of steadying a horse with the snaffle-rein, just touching the curb, as he did so, for security. It was but a motion of his fingers and no one could see it, but it made him confident that he had learned his lesson. "Up to the bit," he repeated; "by George, yes; up to the bit. There's nothing like it for a trained mare. Give her her head, but steady her." And Archie, as the words passed across his memory and were almost pronounced, seemed to be flying successfully over some prodigious fence. He leaned himself back a little in the saddle, and seemed to hold firm with his legs. That was the way to do it. And then the spurs! He would not

forget the spurs. She should know that he wore a spur, and that, if necessary, he would use it. Then he, too, gave a little click with his tongue, and an acute observer might have seen the motion of his heel.

Two hours after that he was still sitting in the smoking-room, chewing the end of a cigar, when Doodles came down victorious from the billiard-room. Archie was half asleep, and did not notice the entrance of his friend. "Let her know that you're there," said Doodles, close into Archie Clavering's ear. — "Damme, let her know that you're there." Archie started and did not like the surprise, or the warm breath in his ear; but he forgave the offence for the wisdom of the words that had been spoken.

Then he walked home by himself, repeating again and again the invaluable teachings of his friend.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Captain Clavering makes his First Attempt.

DURING breakfast on the following day, — which means from the hour of one till two, for the glasses of iced gin-and-water had been many, — Archie Clavering was making up his mind that he would begin at once. He would go to Bolton Street on that day, and make an attempt to be admitted. If not admitted to-day he would make another attempt to-morrow, and, if still unsuccessful, he would write a letter; not a letter containing an offer, which according to Archie's ideas would not be letting her know that he was there in a manner sufficiently potential, — but a letter in which he would explain that he had very grave reasons for

wishing to see his near and dear connexion, Lady Ongar. Soon after two he sallied out, and he also went to a hairdresser's. He was aware that in doing so he was hardly obeying his friend to the letter, as this sort of operation would come rather under the head of handling a filly with a light touch; but he thought that he could in this way, at any rate, do no harm, if he would only remember the instructions he had received when in presence of the trained mare. It was nearly three when he found himself in Bolton Street, having calculated that Lady Ongar might be more probably found at home then than at a later hour. But when he came to the door, instead of knocking he passed by it. He began to remember that he had not yet made up his mind by what means he would bring it about that she should certainly know that he was there. So he took a little turn up the street, away from Piccadilly, through a narrow passage that there is in those parts, and by some stables, and down into Piccadilly, and again to Bolton Street; during which little tour he had made up his mind that it could hardly become his duty to teach her that great lesson on this occasion. She must undoubtedly be taught to know that he was there, but not so taught on this, his first visit. That lesson should quickly precede his offer; and, although he had almost hoped in the interval between two of his beakers of gin-and-water on the preceding evening that he might ride the race and win it altogether during this very morning visit he was about to make, in his cooler moments he had begun to reflect that that would hardly be practicable. The mare must get a gallop before she would be in a condition to be brought out. So Archie

knocked at the door, intending merely to give the mare a gallop if he should find her in to-day.

He gave his name, and was shown at once up into Lady Ongar's drawing-room. Lady Ongar was not there, but she soon came down, and entered the room with a smile on her face and with an outstretched hand. Between the man-servant who took the captain's name, and the maid-servant who carried it up to her mistress, — but who did not see the gentleman before she did so, there had arisen some mistake, and Lady Ongar, as she came down from her chamber above expected that she was to meet another man. Harry Clavering, she thought, had come to her at last. "I'll be down at once," Lady Ongar had said, dismissing the girl and then standing for a moment before her mirror as she smoothed her hair, obliterated as far as it might be possible the ugliness of her cap, and shook out the folds of her dress. A countess, a widow, a woman of the world who had seen enough to make her composed under all circumstances, one would say, — a trained mare as Doodles had called her, — she stood before her glass doubting and trembling like a girl, when she heard that Harry Clavering was waiting for her below. We may surmise that she would have spared herself some of this trouble had she known the real name of her visitor. Then, as she came slowly down the stairs, she reflected how she would receive him. He had stayed away from her, and she would be cold to him, — cold and formal as she had been on the railway platform. She knew well how to play that part. Yes; it was his turn now to show some eagerness of friendship, if there was ever to be anything more than friendship between them. But

she changed all this as she put her hand upon the lock of the door. She would be honest to him, — honest and true. She was in truth glad to see him, and he should know it. What cared she now for the common ways of women and the usual coynesses of feminine coquetry? She told herself also, in language somewhat differing from that which Doodles had used, that her filly days were gone by, and that she was now a trained mare. All this passed through her mind as her hand was on the door; and then she opened it, with a smiling face and ready hand, to find herself in the presence of — Captain Archie Clavering.

The captain was sharp-sighted enough to observe the change in her manner. The change, indeed, was visible enough, and was such that it at once knocked out of Archie's breast some portion of the courage with which his friend's lessons had inspired him. The outstretched hand fell slowly to her side, the smile gave place to a look of composed dignity which made Archie at once feel that the fate which called upon him to woo a countess was in itself hard. And she walked slowly into the room before she spoke to him, or he to her.

"Captain Clavering!" she said at last, and there was much more of surprise than of welcome in her words as she uttered them.

"Yes, Lady On —, Julia, that is; I thought I might as well come and call, as I found we weren't to see you at Clavering when we were all there at Easter." When she had been living in his brother's house as one of the family he had called her Julia, as Hugh had done. The connection between them had been close, and it had come naturally to him to do so.

He had thought much of this since his present project had been initiated, and had strongly resolved not to lose the advantage of his former familiarity. He had very nearly broken down at the onset, but, as the reader will have observed, had recovered himself.

"You are very good," she said; and then as he had been some time standing with his right hand presented to her, she just touched it with her own.

"There's nothing I hate so much as stuff and nonsense," said Archie. To this remark she simply bowed, remaining awfully quiet. Captain Clavering felt that her silence was in truth awful. She had always been good at talking, and he had paused for her to say something; but when she bowed to him in that stiff manner, — "doosed stiff she was; doosed stiff, and impudent too," he told Doodles afterwards; — he knew that he must go on himself. "Stuff and nonsense is the mischief, you know." Then she bowed again. "There's been something the matter with them all down at Clavering since you came home, Julia; but hang me if I can find out what it is!" Still she was silent. "It ain't Hermy; that I must say. Hermy always speaks of you as though there had never been anything wrong." This assurance, we may say, must have been flattering to the lady whom he was about to court.

"Hermy was always too good to me," said Lady Ongar, smiling.

"By George, she always does. If there's anything wrong it's been with Hugh; and, by George, I don't know what it is he was up to when you first came home. It wasn't my doing; — of course you know that."

"I never thought that anything was your doing, Captain Clavering."

"I think Hugh had been losing money; I do indeed. He was like a bear with a sore head just at that time. There was no living in the house with him. I daresay Hermy may have told you all about that."

"Hermione is not by nature so communicative as you are, Captain Clavering."

"Isn't she? I should have thought between sisters — but of course that's no business of mine." Again she was silent, awfully silent, and he became aware that he must either get up and go away or carry on the conversation himself. To do either seemed to be equally difficult, and for a while he sat there almost gasping in his misery. He was quite aware that as yet he had not made her know that he was there. He was not there, as he well knew, in his friend Doodles' sense of the word. "At any rate there isn't any good in quarrelling, is there, Julia?" he said at last. Now that he had asked a question, surely she must speak.

"There is great good sometimes I think," said she, "in people remaining apart and not seeing each other. Sir Hugh Clavering has not quarrelled with me, that I am aware. Indeed, since my marriage there have been no means of quarrelling between us. But I think it quite as well that he and I should not come together."

"But he particularly wants you to go to Clavering."

"Has he sent you here as his messenger?"

"Sent me! oh dear no; nothing of that sort. I have come altogether on my own hook. If Hugh wants a

messenger he must find some one else. But you and I were always friends you know," — at this assertion she opened her large eyes widely, and simply smiled; — "and I thought that perhaps you might be glad to see me if I called. That was all."

"You are very good, Captain Clavering."

"I couldn't bear to think that you should be here in London, and that one shouldn't see anything of you or know anything about you. Tell me now; is there anything I can do for you? Do you want anybody to settle anything for you in the City?"

"I think not, Captain Clavering; thank you very much."

"Because I should be so happy; I should indeed. There's nothing I should like so much as to make myself useful in some way. Isn't there anything now? There must be so much to be looked after, — about money and all that."

"My lawyer does all that, Captain Clavering."

"Those fellows are such harpies. There is no end to their charges; and all for doing things that would only be a pleasure to me."

"I'm afraid I can't employ you in any matter that would suit your tastes."

"Can't you indeed, now?" Then again there was a silence, and Captain Clavering was beginning to think that he must go. He was willing to work hard at talking or anything else; but he could not work if no ground for starting were allowed to him. He thought he must go, though he was aware that he had not made even the slightest preparation for future obedience to his friend's precepts. He began to feel that he had commenced wrongly. He should have made

her know that he was there from the first moment of her entrance into the room. He must retreat now in order that he might advance with more force on the next occasion. He had just made up his mind to this and was doubting how he might best get himself out of his chair with the purpose of going, when sudden relief came in the shape of another visitor. The door was thrown open and Madame Gordeloup was announced.

"Well, my angel," said the little woman, running up to her friend and kissing her on either side of her face. Then she turned round as though she had only just seen the strange gentleman, and curtsied to him. Captain Clavering, holding his hat in both his hands, bowed to the little woman.

"My sister's brother-in-law, Captain Clavering," said Lady Ongar. "Madame Gordeloup."

Captain Clavering bowed again. "Ah, Sir Oo's brother," said Madame Gordeloup. "I am very glad to see Captain Clavering; and is your sister come?"

"No; my sister is not come."

"Lady Clavering is not in town this spring," said the captain.

"Ah, not in town! Then I do pity her. There is only de one place to live in, and that is London, for April, May, and June. Lady Clavering is not coming to London?"

"Her little boy isn't quite the thing," said the captain.

"Not quite de ting?" said the Franco-Pole in an inquiring voice, not exactly understanding the gentleman's language.

"My little nephew is ill, and my sister does not think it wise to bring him to London."

"Ah; that is a pity. And Sir Oo? Sir Oo is in London?"

"Yes," said the captain; "my brother has been up some time."

"And his lady left alone in the country? Poor lady! But your English ladies like the country. They are fond of the fields and the daisies. So they say; but I think often they lie. Me; I like the houses, and the people, and the pavé. The fields are damp, and I love not rheumatism at all." Then the little woman shrugged her shoulders and shook herself. "Tell us the truth, Julie; which do you like best, the town or the country?"

"Whichever I'm not in, I think."

"Ah, just so. Whichever you are not in at present. That is because you are still idle. You have not settled yourself?" At this reference to the possibility of Lady Ongar settling herself, Captain Clavinging pricked up his ears, and listened eagerly for what might come next. He only knew of one way in which a young woman without a husband could settle herself. "You must wait, my dear, a little longer, just a little longer, till the time of your trouble has passed by."

"Don't talk such nonsense, Sophie," said the countess.

"Ah, my dear, it is no nonsense. I am always telling her, Captain Clavinging, that she must go through this black, troublesome time as quick as she can; and then nobody will enjoy the town so much as de rich and beautiful Lady Ongar. Is it not so, Captain Clavinging?"

Archie thought that the time had now come for

him to say something pretty, so that his love might begin to know that he was there. "By George, yes, there'll be nobody so much admired when she comes out again. There never was anybody so much admired before, — before, — that is, when you were Julia Brabazon, you know; and I shouldn't wonder if you didn't come out quite as strong as ever."

"As strong!" said the Franco-Pole. "A woman that has been married is always more admired than a meess."

"Sophie, might I ask you and Captain Clavering to be a little less personal?"

"There is noting I hate so much as your meesses," continued Madame Gordeloup; "noting! Your English meesses give themselves such airs. Now in Paris, or in dear Vienna, or in St. Petersburg, they are not like that at all. There they are nobodies — they are nobodies; but then they will be something very soon, which is to be better. Your English meess is so much and so grand, she never can be greater and grander. So when she is a mamma, she lives down in the country by herself, and looks after de pills and de powders. I don't like that. I don't like that at all. No; if my husband had put me into the country to look after de pills and de powders, he should have had them all, all — himself, when he came to see me." As she said this with great energy, she opened her eyes wide, and looked full into Archie's face.

Captain Clavering, who was sitting with his hat in his two hands between his knees, stared at the little foreigner. He had heard before of women poisoning their husbands, but never had heard a woman advocate the system as expedient. Nor had he often heard a

woman advocate any system with the vehemence which Madame Gordeloup now displayed on this matter, and with an allusion which was so very pointed to the special position of his own sister-in-law. Did Lady Ongar agree with her? He felt as though he should like to know his Julia's opinions on that matter.

"Sophie, Captain Clavering will think you are in earnest," said the countess, laughing.

"So I am — in earnest. It is all wrong. You boil all the water out of de pot before you put the gigot into it. So the gigot is no good, is tough and dry, and you shut it up in an old house in the country. Then, to make matters pretty, you talk about de fields and de daisies. I know. 'Thank you,' I should say. 'De fields and de daisies are so nice and so good! Suppose you go down, my love, and walk in the fields, and pick de daisies, and send them up to me by de railway!' Yes, that is what I would say."

Captain Clavering was now quite in the dark, and began to regard the little woman as a lunatic. When she spoke of the pot and the gigot he vainly endeavoured to follow her; and now that she had got among the daisies he was 'more at a loss than ever. Fruit, vegetables, and cut flowers came up, he knew, to London regularly from Clavering, when the family was in town; — but no daisies. In France it must, he supposed, be different. He was aware, however, of his ignorance, and said nothing.

"No one ever did try to shut you up, Sophie?"

"No, indeed; M. Gordeloup knew better. What would he do if I were shut up? And no one will ever shut you up, my dear. If I were you, I would give no one a chance."

"Don't say that," said the captain, almost passionately; "don't say that."

"Ha, ha! but I do say it. Why should a woman who has got everything marry again? If she wants de fields and de daisies she has got them of her own — yes, of her own. If she wants de town, she has got that too. Jewels, — she can go and buy them. Coaches, — there they are. Parties, — one, two, three, every night, as many as she please. Gentlemen who will be her humble slaves; such a plenty, — all London. Or, if she want to be alone, no one can come near her. Why should she marry? No."

"But she might be in love with somebody," said the captain, in a surprised but humble tone.

"Love! Bah! Be in love, so that she may be shut up in an old barrack with de powders!" The way in which that word barrack was pronounced, and the middle letters sounded, almost lifted the captain off his seat. "Love is very pretty at seventeen, when the imagination is telling a parcel of lies, and when life is one dream. To like people, — oh, yes; to be very fond of your friends, — oh, yes; to be most attached, — as I am to my Julie," — here she got hold of Lady Ongar's hand, — "it is the salt of life! But what you call love, booing and cooing, with rhymes and verses about de moon, it is to go back to pap and panade, and what you call bibs. No; if a woman wants a house, and de something to live on, let her marry a husband; or if a man want to have children, let him marry a wife. But to be shut up in a country house, when everything you have got of your own, — I say it is bad."

Captain Clavering was heartily sorry that he had mentioned the fact of his sister-in-law being left at home

at Clavering Park. It was most unfortunate. How could he make it understood that if he were married he would not think of shutting his wife up at Ongar Park? "Lady Clavering, you know, does come to London generally," he said.

"Bah!" exclaimed the little Franco-Pole.

"And as for me, I never should be happy, if I were married, unless I had my wife with me everywhere," said Captain Clavering.

"Bah-ah-ah!" ejaculated the lady.

Captain Clavering could not endure this any longer. He felt that the manner of the lady was, to say the least of it, unpleasant, and he perceived that he was doing no good to his own cause. So he rose from his chair and muttered some words with the intention of showing his purpose of departure.

"Good-by, Captain Clavering," said Lady Ongar. "My love to my sister when you see her."

Archie shook hands with her and then made his bow to Madame Gordeloup.

"Au revoir, my friend," she said, "and you remember all I say. It is not good for de wife to be all alone in the country, while de husband walk about in the town and make an eye to every lady he see." Archie would not trust himself to renew the argument, but bowing again, made his way off.

"He was come for one admirer," said Sophie, as soon as the door was closed.

"An admirer of whom?"

"Not of me; — oh, no; I was not in danger at all."

"Of me? Captain Clavering! Sophie, you get your head full of the strangest nonsense."

"Ah; very well. You see. What will you give me if I am right? Will you bet? Why had he got on his new gloves, and had his head all smelling with stuff from de hairdresser? Does he come always perfumed like that? Does he wear shiny little boots to walk about in de morning, and make an eye always? Perhaps yes."

"I never saw his boots or his eyes."

"But I see them. I see many things. He come to have Ongere Park for his own. I tell you, yes. Ten thousand will come to have Ongere Park. Why not? To have Ongere Park and all de money a man will make himself smell a great deal."

"You think much more about all that than is necessary."

"Do I, my dear? Very well. There are three already. There is Edouard, and there is this Clavering who you say is a captain; and there is the other Clavering who goes with his nose in the air, and who think himself a clever fellow because he learned his lesson at school and did not get himself whipped. He will be whipped yet some day, — perhaps."

"Sophie, hold your tongue. Captain Clavering is my sister's brother-in-law, and Harry Clavering is my friend."

"Ah, friend! I know what sort of friend he wants to be. How much better to have a park and plenty of money than to work in a ditch and make a railway! But he do not know the way with a woman. Perhaps he may be more at home, as you say, in the ditch. I should say to him, 'My friend, you will do well in de ditch if you work hard; — suppose you stay there.'"

"You don't seem to like my cousin, and if you please, we will talk no more about him."

"Why should I not like him? He don't want to get any money from me."

"That will do, Sophie."

"Very well; it shall do for me. But this other man that come here to-day. He is a fool."

"Very likely."

"He did not learn his lesson without whipping."

"Nor with whipping either."

"No; he have learned nothing. He does not know what to do with his hat. He is a fool. Come, Julie, will you take me out for a drive? It is melancholy for you to go alone; I came to ask you for a drive. Shall we go?" And they did go, Lady Ongar and Sophie Gordeloup together. Lady Ongar, as she submitted, despised herself for her submission; but what was she to do? It is sometimes very difficult to escape from the meshes of friendship.

Captain Clavering, when he left Bolton Street, went down to his club, having first got rid of his shining boots and new gloves. He sauntered up into the billiard-room knowing that his friend would be there, and there he found Doodles with his coat off, the sleeves of his shirt turned back, and armed with his cue. His brother captain, the moment that he saw him, presented the cue at his breast. "Does she know you're there, old fellow? I say, does she know you're there?" The room was full of men, and the whole thing was done so publicly that Captain Clavering was almost offended.

"Come, Doodles, you go on with your game," said he; "it's you to play." Doodles turned to the table, and scientifically pocketed the ball on which he played;

then he laid his own ball close under the cushion, picked up a shilling and put it into his waistcoat pocket, holding a lighted cigar in his mouth the while, and then he came back to his friend. "Well, Clavvy, how has it been?"

"Oh, nothing as yet, you know."

"Haven't you seen her?"

"Yes, I've seen her, of course. I'm not the fellow to let the grass grow under my feet. I've only just come from her house."

"Well, well?"

"That's nothing much to tell the first day, you know."

"Did you let her know you were there? That's the chat. Damme, did you let her know you were there?"

In answer to this Archie attempted to explain that he was not as yet quite sure that he had been successful in that particular; but in the middle of his story Captain Doodles was called off to exercise his skill again, and on this occasion to pick up two shillings. "I'm sorry for you, Griggs," he said, as a very young lieutenant, whose last life he had taken, put up his cue with a look of ineffable disgust, and whose shilling Doodles had pocketed; "I'm sorry for you, very; but a fellow must play the game, you know." Whereupon Griggs walked out of the room with a gait that seemed to show that he had his own ideas upon that matter, though he did not choose to divulge them. Doodles instantly returned to his friend. "With cattle of that kind it's no use trying the waiting dodge," said he. "You should make your running at once, and trust to bottom to carry you through."

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"But there was a horrid little Frenchwoman came in."

"What; a servant?"

"No; a friend. Such a creature! You should have heard her talk. A kind of confidential friend she seemed, who called her Julie. I had to go away and leave her there, of course."

"Ah! you'll have to tip that woman."

"What, with money?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"It would come very expensive."

"A tenner now and then, you know. She would do your business for you. Give her a brooch first, and then offer to lend her the money. You'd find she'll rise fast enough, if you're any hand for throwing a fly."

"Oh! I could do it, you know."

"Do it then, and let 'em both know that you're there. Yes, Parkyns, I'll divide. And, Clavvy, you can come in now in Griggs' place." Then Captain Clavering stripped himself for the battle.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Blue Posts.

"OH; so you 'ave come to see me. I am so glad." With these words Sophie Gordeloup welcomed Harry Clavering to her room in Mount Street early one morning not long after her interview with Captain Archie in Lady Ongar's presence. On the previous evening Harry had received a note from Lady Ongar, in which she upbraided him for having left unperformed her commission with reference to Count Pateroff. The

letter had begun quite abruptly. "I think it unkind of you that you do not come to me. I asked you to see a certain person on my behalf, and you have not done so. Twice he has been here. Once I was in truth out. He came again the next evening at nine, and I was then ill, and had gone to bed. You understand it all, and must know how this annoys me. I thought you would have done this for me, and I thought I should have seen you. — J." This note he found at his lodgings when he returned home at night, and on the following morning he went in his despair direct to Mount Street, on his way to the Adelphi. It was not yet ten o'clock when he was shown into Madame Gordeloup's presence, and as regarded her dress he did not find her to be quite prepared for morning visitors. But he might well be indifferent on that matter as the lady seemed to disregard the circumstances altogether. On her head she wore what he took to be a nightcap, though I will not absolutely undertake to say that she had slept in that very head-dress. There were frills to it, and a certain attempt at prettiness had been made; but then the attempt had been made so long ago, and the frills were so ignorant of starch and all frillish propensities, that it hardly could pretend to decency. A great white wrapper she also wore, which might not have been objectionable had it not been so long worn that it looked like a university college surplice at the end of the long vacation. Her slippers had all the ease which age could give them, and above the slippers, neatness, to say the least of it, did not predominate. But Sophie herself seemed to be quite at her ease in spite of these deficiencies, and received our hero with an eager pointed

welcome, which I can hardly describe as affectionate, and which Harry did not at all understand.

"I have to apologise for troubling you," he began.

"Trouble, what trouble? Bah! You give me no trouble. It is you have the trouble to come here. You come early and I have not got my crinoline. If you are contented so am I." Then she smiled, and sat herself down suddenly, letting herself almost fall into her special corner in the sofa. "Take a chair, Mr. Harry; then we can talk more comfortable."

"I want especially to see your brother. Can you give me his address?"

"What? Edouard — certainly; Travellers' Club."

"But he is never there."

"He sends every day for his letters. You want to see him. Why?"

Harry was at once confounded, having no answer.

"A little private business," he said.

"Ah; a little private business. You do not owe him a little money, I am afraid, or you would not want to see him. Ha, ha! You write to him, and he will see you. There; — there is paper and pen and ink. He shall get your letter this day."

Harry, nothing suspicious, did as he was bid, and wrote a note in which he simply told the count that he was specially desirous of seeing him.

"I will go to you anywhere," said Harry, "if you will name a place."

We, knowing Madame Gordeloup's habits, may feel little doubt but that she thought it her duty to become acquainted with the contents of the note before she sent it out of her house, but we may also know that she learned very little from it.

"It shall go, almost immediately," said Sophie, when the envelope was closed.

Then Harry got up to depart, having done his work. "What, you are going in that way at once? You are in a hurry?"

"Well, yes; I am in a hurry, rather, Madame Gordeloup. I have got to be at my office, and I only just came up here to find out your brother's address." Then he rose and went, leaving the note behind him.

Then Madame Gordeloup, speaking to herself in French, called Harry Clavering a lout, a fool, an awkward overgrown boy, and a pig. She declared him to be a pig nine times over, then shook herself in violent disgust, and after that betook herself to the letter.

The letter was at any rate duly sent to the count, for before Harry had left Mr. Beilby's chambers on that day, Pateroff came to him there. Harry sat in the same room with other men, and therefore went out to see his acquaintance in a little antechamber that was used for such purposes. As he walked from one room to the other, he was conscious of the delicacy and difficulty of the task before him, and the colour was high in his face as he opened the door. But when he had done so, he saw that the count was not alone. A gentleman was with him, whom he did not introduce to Harry, and before whom Harry could not say that which he had to communicate.

"Pardon me," said the count, "but we are in railroad hurry. Nobody ever was in such a haste as I and my friend. You are not engaged to-morrow? No, I see. You dine with me and my friend at the Blue Posts. You know the Blue Posts?"

Harry said he did not know the Blue Posts.

"Then you shall know the Blue Posts. I will be your instructor. You drink claret. Come and see. You eat beefsteaks? Come and try. You love one glass of port wine with your cheese? No. But you shall love it when you have dined with me at the Blue Posts. We will dine altogether after the English way; — which is the best way in the world when it is quite good. It is quite good at the Blue Posts; — quite good! Seven o'clock. You are fined when a minute late; an extra glass of port wine a minute. Now I must go. Ah; yes. I am ruined already."

Then Count Pateroff, holding his watch in his hand, bolted out of the room before Harry could say a word to him.

He had nothing for it but to go to the dinner, and to the dinner he went. On that same evening, the evening of the day on which he had seen Sophie and her brother, he wrote to Lady Ongar, using to her the same manner of writing that she had used to him, and telling her that he had done his best, that he had now seen him whom he had been desired to see, but that he had not been able to speak to him. He was, however, to dine with him on the following day, — and would call in Bolton Street as soon as possible after that interview.

Exactly at seven o'clock, Harry, having the fear of the threatened fine before his eyes, was at the Blue Posts; and there standing in the middle of the room, he saw Count Pateroff. With Count Pateroff was the same gentleman whom Harry had seen at the Adelphi, and whom the count now introduced as Colonel Schmooff; and also a little Englishman with a knowing eye and

a bull-dog neck, and whiskers cut very short and trim, — a horsey little man, whom the count also introduced. "Captain Boodle; says he knows a cousin of yours, Mr. Clavering."

Then Colonel Schmoff bowed, never yet having spoken a word in Harry's hearing, and our old friend Doodles with glib volubility told Harry how intimate he was with Archie, and how he knew Sir Hugh, and how he had met Lady Clavering, and how "doosed" glad he was to meet Harry himself on this present occasion.

"And now, my boys, we'll set down," said the count. "There's just a little soup, printanière; yes, they can make soup here; then a cut of salmon; and after that the beefsteak. Nothing more. Schmoff, my boy, can you eat beefsteak?"

Schmoff neither smiled nor spoke, but simply bowed his head gravely, and sitting down, arranged with slow exactness his napkin over his waistcoat and lap.

"Captain Boodle, can you eat beefsteak," said the count; "Blue Posts' beefsteak?"

"Try me," said Doodles. "That's all. Try me."

"I will try you, and I will try Mr. Clavering. Schmoff would eat a horse if he had not a bullock, and a piece of a jackass if he had not a horse."

"I did eat a horse in Hamboro' once. We was besieged."

So much said Schmoff, very slowly, in a deep bass voice, speaking from the bottom of his chest, and frowning very heavily as he did so. The exertion was so great that he did not repeat it for a considerable time.

"Thank God we are not besieged now," said the

count, as the soup was handed round to them. "Ah, Albert, my friend, that is good soup; very good soup. My compliments to the excellent Stubbs. Mr. Clavering, the excellent Stubbs is the cook. I am quite at home here and they do their best for me. You need not fear you will have any of Schmoff's horse."

This was all very pleasant, and Harry Clavering sat down to his dinner prepared to enjoy it; but there was a sense about him during the whole time that he was being taken in and cheated, and that the count would cheat him and actually escape away from him on that evening without his being able to speak a word to him. They were dining in a public room, at a large table which they had to themselves, while others were dining at small tables round them. Even if Schmoff and Boodle had not been there, he could hardly have discussed Lady Ongar's private affairs in such a room as that. The count had brought him there to dine in this way with a premeditated purpose of throwing him over, pretending to give him the meeting that had been asked for, but intending that it should pass by and be of no avail. Such was Harry's belief, and he resolved that, though he might have to seize Pateroff by the tails of his coat, the count should not escape him without having been forced at any rate to hear what he had to say. In the meantime the dinner went on very pleasantly.

"Ah," said the count, "there is no fish like salmon early in the year; but not too early. And it should come alive from Grove, and be cooked by Stubbs."

"And eaten by me," said Boodle.

"Under my auspices," said the count, "and then all is well. Mr. Clavering, a little bit near the head?"

Not care about any particular part? That is wrong. Everybody should always learn what is the best to eat of everything, and get it if they can."

"By George, I should think so," said Doodles. "I know I do."

"Not to know the bit out of the neck of the salmon from any other bit, is not to know a false note from a true one. Not to distinguish a '51 wine from a '58, is to look at an arm or a leg on the canvas, and to care nothing whether it is in drawing, or out of drawing. Not to know Stubbs' beefsteak from other beefsteaks, is to say that every woman is the same thing to you. Only, Stubbs will let you have his beefsteak if you will pay him, — him or his master. With the beautiful woman it is not always so; — not always. Do I make myself understood?"

"Clear as mud," said Doodles. "I'm quite along with you there. Why should a man be ashamed of eating what's nice. Everybody does it."

"No, Captain Boodle; not everybody. Some cannot get it, and some do not know it when it comes in their way. They are to be pitied. I do pity them from the bottom of my heart. But there is one poor fellow I do pity more even than they."

There was something in the tone of the count's words, — a simple pathos, and almost a melody, which interested Harry Clavering. No one knew better than Count Pateroff how to use all the inflexions of his voice, and produce from the phrases he used the very highest interest which they were capable of producing. He now spoke of his pity in a way that might almost have made a sensitive man weep. "Who is it that you pity so much?" Harry asked.

"The man who cannot digest," said the count, in a low clear voice. Then he bent down his head over the morsel of food on his plate, as though he were desirous of hiding a tear. "The man who cannot digest!" As he repeated the words he raised his head again, and looked round at all their faces.

"Yes, yes; — mein Gott, yes," said Schmoft, and even he appeared as though he were almost moved from the deep quietude of his inward indifference.

"Ah; talk of blessings! What a blessing is digestion!" said the count. "I do not know whether you have ever thought of it, Captain Boodle? You are young, and perhaps not. Or you, Mr. Clavering? It is a subject worthy of your thoughts. To digest! Do you know what it means. It is to have the sun always shining, and the shade always ready for you. It is to be met with smiles, and to be greeted with kisses. It is to hear sweet sounds, to sleep with sweet dreams, to be touched ever by gentle, soft, cool hands. It is to be in paradise. Adam and Eve were in paradise. Why? Their digestion was good. Ah! then they took liberties, ate bad fruit, — things they could not digest. They what we call ruined their constitutions, destroyed their gastric juices, and then they were expelled from paradise by an angel with a flaming sword. The angel with the flaming sword, which turned two ways, was indigestion! There came a great indigestion upon the earth because the cooks were bad, and they called it a deluge. Ah, I thank God there is to be no more deluges. All the evils come from this. Macbeth could not sleep. It was the supper, not the murder. His wife talked and walked. It was the supper again. Milton had a bad digestion, because he is always so

cross; and your Carlyle must have the worst digestion in the world, because he never says any good of anything. Ah, to digest is to be happy! Believe me, my friends, there is no other way not to be turned out of paradise by a fiery two-handed turning sword."

"It is true," said Schmoff; "yes, it is true."

"I believe you," said Doodles. "And how well the count describes it, don't he, Mr. Clavering? I never looked at it in that light; but, after all, digestion is everything. What is a horse worth, if he won't feed?"

"I never thought much about it," said Harry.

"That is very good," said the great preacher. "Not to think about it ever is the best thing in the world. You will be made to think about it if there be necessity. A friend of mine told me he did not know whether he had a digestion. My friend, I said, you are like the husbandmen; you do not know your own blessings. A bit more steak, Mr. Clavering; see it has come up hot, just to prove that you have the blessing."

There was a pause in the conversation for a minute or two, during which Schmoff and Doodles were very busy giving the required proof; and the count was leaning back in his chair, with a smile of conscious wisdom on his face, looking as though he were in deep consideration of the subject on which he had just spoken with so much eloquence. Harry did not interrupt the silence, as, foolishly, he was allowing his mind to carry itself away from the scene of enjoyment that was present, and trouble itself with the coming battle which he would be obliged to fight with the count. Schmoff was the first to speak. "When I was eating a horse at Hamboro' —" he began.

"Schmoff," said the count, "if we allow you to get

behind the ramparts of that besieged city, we shall have to eat that horse for the rest of the evening. Captain Boodle, if you will believe me, I ate that horse once for two hours. Ah, here is the port wine. Now, Mr. Clavering, this is the wine for cheese; — '34. No man should drink above two glasses of '34. If you want port after that, then have '20."

Schmoff had certainly been hardly treated. He had scarcely spoken a word during dinner, and should, I think, have been allowed to say something of the flavour of the horse. It did not, however, appear from his countenance that he had felt, or that he resented the interference; though he did not make any further attempt to enliven the conversation.

They did not sit long over their wine, and the count, in spite of what he had said about the claret, did not drink any. "Captain Boodle," he said, "you must respect my weakness as well as my strength. I know what I can do, and what I cannot. If I were a real hero, like you English, — which means, if I had an ostrich in my inside, — I would drink till twelve every night, and eat broiled bones till six every morning. But alas! the ostrich has not been given to me. As a common man I am pretty well, but I have no heroic capacities. We will have a little chasse, and then we will smoke."

Harry began to be very nervous. How was he to do it? It had become clearer and clearer to him through every ten minutes of the dinner, that the count did not intend to give him any moment for private conversation. He felt that he was cheated and ill-used, and was waxing angry. They were to go and smoke in a public room, and he knew, or thought he knew, what that

meant. The count would sit there till he went, and had brought the Colonel Schmoff with him, so that he might be sure of some ally to remain by his side and ensure silence. And the count, doubtless, had calculated that when Captain Boodle went, as he soon would go, to his billiards, he, Harry Clavering, would feel himself compelled to go also. No! It should not result in that way. Harry resolved that he would not go. He had his mission to perform and he would perform it, even if he were compelled to do so in the presence of Colonel Schmoff.

Doodles soon went. He could not sit long with the simple gratification of a cigar, without gin-and-water or other comfort of that kind, even though the eloquence of Count Pateroff might be excited in his favour. He was a man, indeed, who did not love to sit still, even with the comfort of gin-and-water. An active little man was Captain Boodle, always doing something or anxious to do something in his own line of business. Small speculations in money, so concocted as to leave the risk against him smaller than the chance on his side, constituted Captain Boodle's trade; and in that trade he was indefatigable, ingenious, and, to a certain extent, successful. The worst of the trade was this; that though he worked at it above twelve hours a day, to the exclusion of all other interests in life, he could only make out of it an income which would have been considered a beggarly failure at any other profession. When he netted a pound a day he considered himself to have done very well; but he could not do that every day in the week. To do it often required unremitting exertion. And then, in spite of all his care, misfortunes would come. "A cursed garron, of whom nobody had

ever heard the name! If a man mayn't take a liberty with such a brute as that, when is he to take a liberty?" So had he expressed himself plaintively, endeavouring to excuse himself, when on some occasion a race had been won by some outside horse which Captain Boodle had omitted to make safe in his betting-book. He was regarded by his intimate friends as a very successful man; but I think myself that his life was a mistake. To live with one's hands ever daubed with chalk from a billiard-table, to be always spying into stables and rubbing against grooms, to put up with the narrow lodgings which needy men encounter at race meetings, to be day after day on the rails running after platers and steeplechasers, to be conscious on all occasions of the expediency of selling your beast when you are hunting, to be counting up little odds at all your spare moments;—these things do not, I think, make a satisfactory life for a young man. And for a man that is not young, they are the very devil! Better have no digestion when you are forty than find yourself living such a life as that! Captain Boodle would, I think, have been happier had he contrived to get himself employed as a tax-gatherer or an attorney's clerk.

On this occasion Doodles soon went, as had been expected, and Harry found himself smoking with the two foreigners. Pateroff was no longer eloquent, but sat with his cigar in his mouth as silent as Colonel Schmoff himself. It was evidently expected of Harry that he should go.

"Count," he said at last, "you got my note?" There were seven or eight persons sitting in the room besides the party of three to which Harry belonged.

"Your note, Mr. Clavering! which note? Oh, yes; I should not have had the pleasure of seeing you here to-day but for that."

"Can you give me five minutes in private?"

"What! now! here! this evening! after dinner? Another time I will talk with you by the hour together."

"I fear I must trouble you now. I need not remind you that I could not keep you yesterday morning; you were so much hurried."

"And now I am having my little moment of comfort! These special business conversations after dinner are so bad for the digestion!"

"If I could have caught you before dinner, Count Pateroff, I would have done so."

"If it must be, it must. Schmoff, will you wait for me ten minutes? I will not be more than ten minutes." And the count as he made this promise looked at his watch. "Waiter," he said, speaking in a sharp tone which Harry had not heard before, "show this gentleman and me into a private room." Harry got up and led the way out, not forgetting to assure himself that he cared nothing for the sharpness of the count's voice.

"Now, Mr. Clavering, what is it?" said the count, looking full into Harry's eye.

"I will tell you in two words."

"In one if you can."

"I came with a message to you from Lady Ongar?"

"Why are you a messenger from Lady Ongar?"

"I have known her long and she is connected with my family."

"Why does she not send her messages by Sir Hugh, — her brother-in-law?"

"It is hardly for you to ask that."

"Yes; it is for me to ask that. I have known Lady Ongar well, and have treated her with kindness. I do not want to have messages by anybody. But go on. If you are a messenger, give your message."

"Lady Ongar bids me tell you that she cannot see you."

"But she must see me. She shall see me!"

"I am to explain to you that she declines to do so. Surely, Count Pateroff, you must understand —"

"Ah, bah; I understand everything; — in such matters as these, better, perhaps, than you, Mr. Clavering. You have given your message. Now, as you are a messenger, will you give mine?"

"That will depend altogether on its nature."

"Sir, I never send uncivil words to a woman, though sometimes I may be tempted to speak them to a man; when, for instance, a man interferes with me; do you understand? My message is this: — tell her ladyship, with my compliments, that it will be better for her to see me, — better for her, and for me. When that poor lord died, — and he had been, mind, my friend for many years before her ladyship had heard his name, — I was with him; and there were occurrences of which you know nothing and need know nothing. I did my best then to be courteous to Lady Ongar, which she returns by shutting her door in my face. I do not mind that. I am not angry with a woman. But tell her that when she has heard what I now say to her by you, she will, I do not doubt, think better of it; and therefore I shall do myself the honour of presenting myself at her door again. Good-night,

Mr. Clavering; au revoir; we will have another of Stubbs' little dinners before long." As he spoke these last words the count's voice was again changed, and the old smile had returned to his face.

Harry shook hands with him and walked away homewards, not without a feeling that the count had got the better of him, even to the end. He had, however, learned how the land lay, and could explain to Lady Ongar that Count Pateroff now knew her wishes and was determined to disregard them.

CHAPTER XX.

Desolation.

IN the meantime there was grief down at the great house of Clavering; and grief, we must suppose also, at the house in Berkeley Square, as soon as the news from his country home had reached Sir Hugh Clavering. Little Hughy, his heir, was dead. Early one morning, Mrs. Clavering, at the rectory, received a message from Lady Clavering, begging that she would go up to the house, and, on arriving there, she found that the poor child was very ill. The doctor was then at Clavering, and had recommended that a message should be sent to the father in London, begging him to come down. This message had been already despatched when Mrs. Clavering arrived. The poor mother was in a state of terrible agony, but at that time there was yet hope. Mrs. Clavering then remained with Lady Clavering for two or three hours; but just before dinner on the same day another messenger came across to say that hope was past, and that the child had gone. Could Mrs.

Clavering come over again, as Lady Clavering was in a sad way?

"You'll have your dinner first?" said the rector.

"No, I think not. I shall wish to make her take something, and I can do it better if I ask for tea for myself. I will go at once. Poor dear little boy."

"It was a blow I always feared," said the rector to his daughter as soon as his wife had left them. "Indeed, I knew that it was coming."

"And she was always fearing it," said Fanny. "But I do not think he did. He never seems to think that evil will come to him."

"He will feel this," said the rector.

"Feel it, papa! Of course he will feel it."

"I do not think he would, — not deeply, that is, — if there were four or five of them. He is a hard man; — the hardest man I ever knew. Who ever saw him playing with his own child, or with any other? Who ever heard him say a soft word to his wife? But he will be hit now, for this child was his heir. He will be hit hard now, and I pity him."

Mrs. Clavering went across the park alone, and soon found herself in the poor bereaved mother's room. She was sitting by herself, having driven the old house-keeper away from her; and there were no traces of tears then on her face, though she had wept plentifully when Mrs. Clavering had been with her in the morning. But there had come upon her suddenly a look of age, which nothing but such sorrow as this can produce. Mrs. Clavering was surprised to see that she had dressed herself carefully since the morning, as was her custom to do daily, even when alone; and that she was not in

her bedroom, but in a small sitting-room, which she generally used when Sir Hugh was not at the park.

"My poor Hermione," said Mrs. Clavering, coming up to her, and taking her by the hand.

"Yes, I am poor; poor enough. Why have they troubled you to come across again?"

"Did you not send for me? But it was quite right, whether you sent or no. Of course I should come when I heard it. It cannot be good for you to be all alone."

"I suppose he will be here to-night?"

"Yes, if he got your message before three o'clock."

"Oh, he will have received it, and I suppose he will come. You think he will come, eh?"

"Of course he will come."

"I do not know. He does not like coming to the country."

"He will be sure to come now, Hermione."

"And who will tell him? Some one must tell him before he comes to me. Should there not be some one to tell him? They have sent another message."

"Hannah shall be at hand to tell him." Hannah was the old housekeeper, who had been in the family when Sir Hugh was born. "Or, if you wish it, Henry shall come down and remain here. I am sure he will do so, if it will be a comfort."

"No; he would, perhaps, be rough to Mr. Clavering. He is so very hard. Hannah shall do it. Will you make her understand?" Mrs. Clavering, promised that she would do this, wondering, as she did so, at the wretched, frigid immobility of the unfortunate woman before her. She knew Lady Clavering well; — knew her to be in many things weak, to be worldly,

listless, and, perhaps somewhat selfish; but she knew also that she had loved her child as mothers always love. Yet, at this moment, it seemed that she was thinking more of her husband than of the bairn she had lost. Mrs. Clavering had sat down by her and taken her hand, and was still so sitting in silence when Lady Clavering spoke again. "I suppose he will turn me out of his house now," she said.

"Who will do so? Hugh? Oh, Hermione, how can you speak in such a way?"

"He scolded me before because my poor darling was not strong. My darling! How could I help it? And he scolded me because there was none other but he. He will turn me out altogether now. Oh, Mrs. Clavering, you do not know how hard he is."

Anything was better than this, and therefore Mrs. Clavering asked the poor woman to take her into the room where the little body lay in its little cot. If she could induce the mother to weep for the child, even that would be better than this hard persistent fear as to what her husband would say and do. So they both went and stood together over the little fellow whose short sufferings had thus been brought to an end. "My poor dear, what can I say to comfort you?" Mrs. Clavering, as she asked this, knew well that no comfort could be spoken in words; but — if she could only make the sufferer weep!

"Comfort!" said the mother. "There is no comfort now, I believe, in anything. It is long since I knew any comfort; not since Julia went."

"Have you written to Julia?"

"No; I have written to no one. I cannot write. I feel as though if it were to bring him back again I

could not write of it. My boy! my boy! my boy!" But still there was not a tear in her eye.

"I will write to Julia," said Mrs. Clavering; "and I will read to you my letter."

"No, do not read it me. What is the use? He has made her quarrel with me. Julia cares nothing now for me, or for my angel. Why should she care? When she came home we would not see her. Of course she will not care. Who is there that will care for me?"

"Do not I care for you, Hermione?"

"Yes, because you are here; because of the nearness of the houses. If you lived far away you would not care for me. It is just the custom of the thing." There was something so true in this that Mrs. Clavering could make no answer to it. Then they turned to go back into the sitting-room, and as they did so Lady Clavering lingered behind for a moment; but when she was again with Mrs. Clavering her cheek was still dry.

"He will be at the station at nine," said Lady Clavering. "They must send the brougham for him, or the dog-cart. He will be very angry if he is made to come home in the fly from the public-house." Then the elder lady left the room and gave orders that Sir Hugh should be met by his carriage. What must the wife think of her husband, when she feared that he would be angered by little matters at such a time as this! "Do you think it will make him very unhappy?" Lady Clavering asked.

"Of course it will make him unhappy. How should it be otherwise?"

"He had said so often that the child would die. He will have got used to the fear."

"His grief will be as fresh now as though he had never thought so, and never said so."

"He is so hard; and then he has such will, such power. He will thrust it off from him and determine that it shall not oppress him. I know him so well."

"We should all make some exertion like that in our sorrow, trusting to God's kindness to relieve us. You too, Hermione, should determine also; but not yet, my dear. At first it is better to let sorrow have its way."

"But he will determine at once. You remember when Meeny went." Meeny had been a little girl who had been born before the boy, and who had died when little more than twelve months old. "He did not expect that; but then he only shook his head, and went out of the room. He has never spoken to me one word of her since that. I think he has forgotten Meeny altogether, — even that she was ever here."

"He cannot forget the boy who was his heir."

"Ah, that is where it is. He will say words to me which would make you creep if you could hear them. Yes, my darling was his heir. Archie will marry now, and will have children, and his boy will be the heir. There will be more division and more quarrels, for Hugh will hate his brother now."

"I do not understand why."

"Because he is so hard. It is a pity he should ever have married, for he wants nothing that a wife can do for him. He wanted a boy to come after him in the estate, and now that glory has been taken from him. Mrs. Clavering, I often wish that I could die."

It would be bootless here to repeat the words of wise and loving counsel with which the elder of the

two ladies endeavoured to comfort the younger, and to make her understand what were the duties which still remained to her, and which, if they were rightly performed, would in their performance, soften the misery of her lot. Lady Clavering listened with that dull, useless attention which on such occasions sorrow always gives to the prudent counsels of friendship; but she was thinking ever and always of her husband, and watching the moment of his expected return. In her heart she wished that he might not come on that evening. At last, at half-past nine, she exerted herself to send away her visitor.

"He will be here soon, if he comes to-night," Lady Clavering said, "and it will be better that he should find me alone."

"Will it be better?"

"Yes, yes. Cannot you see how he would frown and shake his head if you were here? I would sooner be alone when he comes. Good-night. You have been very kind to me; but you are always kind. Things are done kindly always at your house, because there is so much love there. You will write to Julia for me? Good-night." Then Mrs. Clavering kissed her and went, thinking as she walked home in the dark to the rectory, how much she had to be thankful in that these words had been true which her poor neighbour had spoken. Her house was full of love.

For the next half-hour Lady Clavering sat alone listening with eager ear for the sound of her husband's wheels, and at last she had almost told herself that the hour for his coming had gone by, when she heard the rapid grating on the gravel as the dog-cart was driven up to the door. She ran out on to the corridor, but

her heart sank within her as she did so, and she took tightly hold of the balustrade to support herself. For a moment she had thought of running down to meet him; — of trusting to the sadness of the moment to produce in him, if it were but for a minute, something of tender solicitude; but she remembered that the servants would be there, and knew that he would not be soft before them. She remembered also that the house-keeper had received her instructions, and she feared to disarrange the settled programme. So she went back to the open door of the room, that her retreating step might not be heard by him as he should come up to her, and standing there she still listened. The house was silent and her ears were acute with sorrow. She could hear the movement of the old woman as she gently, trembling, as Lady Clavering knew, made her way down the hall to meet her master. Sir Hugh of course had learned his child's fate already from the servant who had met him; but it was well that the ceremony of such telling should be performed. She felt the cold air come in from the opened front door, and she heard her husband's heavy quick step as he entered. Then she heard the murmur of Hannah's voice; but the first word she heard was in her husband's tones, "Where is Lady Clavering?" Then the answer was given, and the wife, knowing that he was coming, retreated back to her chair.

But still he did not come quite at once. He was pulling off his coat and laying aside his hat and gloves. Then came upon her a feeling that at such a time any other husband and wife would have been at once in each other's arms. And at the moment she thought of all that they had lost. To her her child had been all

and everything. To him he had been his heir and the prop of his house. The boy had been the only link that had still bound them together. Now he was gone, and there was no longer any link between them. He was gone and she had nothing left to her. He was gone, and the father was also alone in the world without any heir and with no prop to his house. She thought of all this as she heard his step coming slowly up the stairs. Slowly he came along the passage, and though she dreaded his coming it almost seemed as though he would never be there.

When he had entered the room she was the first to speak. "Oh, Hugh!" she exclaimed, "oh, Hugh!" He had closed the door before he uttered a word, and then he threw himself into a chair. There were candles near to him and she could see that his countenance also was altered. He had indeed been stricken hard, and his half-stunned face showed the violence of the blow. The harsh, cruel, selfish man had at last been made to suffer. Although he had spoken of it and had expected it, the death of his heir hit him hard, as the rector had said.

"When did he die?" asked the father.

"It was past four I think." Then there was again silence, and Lady Clavering went up to her husband and stood close by his shoulder. At last she ventured to put her hand upon him. With all her own misery heavy upon her, she was chiefly thinking at this moment how she might soothe him. She laid her hand upon his shoulder, and by degrees she moved it softly to his breast. Then he raised his own hand and with it moved hers from his person. He did it gently; — but what was the use of such nonsense as that?

"The Lord giveth," said the wife, "and the Lord taketh away." Hearing this Sir Hugh made with his head a gesture of impatience. "Blessed be the name of the Lord," continued Lady Clavering. Her voice was low and almost trembling, and she repeated the words as though they were a task which she had set herself.

"That's all very well in its way," said he, "but what's the special use of it now? I hate twaddle. One must bear one's misfortune as one best can. I don't believe that kind of thing ever makes it lighter."

"They say it does, Hugh."

"Ah! they say! Have they ever tried? If you have been living up to that kind of thing all your life, it may be very well; — that is as well at one time as another. But it won't give me back my boy."

"No, Hugh; he will never come back again; but we may think that he's in Heaven."

"If that is enough for you, let it be so. But don't talk to me of it. I don't like it. It doesn't suit me. I had only one, and he has gone. It is always the way." He spoke of the child as having been his — not his and hers. She felt this, and understood the want of affection which it conveyed; but she said nothing of it.

"Oh, Hugh; what could we do? It was not our fault."

"Who is talking of any fault? I have said nothing as to fault. He was always poor and sickly. The Claverings, generally, have been so strong. Look at myself, and Archie, and my sisters. Well, it cannot be helped. Thinking of it will not bring him back again. You had better tell some one to get me some-

thing to eat. I came away, of course, without any dinner."

She herself had eaten nothing since the morning, but she neither spoke nor thought of that. She rang the bell, and going out into the passage gave the servant the order on the stairs.

"It is no good my staying here," he said. "I will go and dress. It is the best not to think of such things, — much the best. People call that heartless, of course, but then people are fools. If I were to sit still, and think of it for a week together, what good could I do?"

"But how not to think of it? that is the thing."

"Women are different, I suppose. I will dress and then go down to the breakfast-room. Tell Saunders to get me a bottle of champagne. You will be better also if you will take a glass of wine."

It was the first word he had spoken which showed any care for her, and she was grateful for it. As he arose to go, she came close to him again, and put her hand very gently on his arm. "Hugh," she said, "will you not see him?"

"What good will that do?"

"I think you would regret it if you were to let them take him away without looking at him. He is so pretty as he lies in his little bed. I thought you would come with me to see him." He was more gentle with her than she had expected, and she led him away to the room which had been their own, and in which the child had died.

"Why here?" he said, almost angrily, as he entered.

"I have had him here with me since you went."

"He should not be here now," he said, shuddering. "I wish he had been moved before I came. I will not have this room any more; remember that." She led him up to the foot of the little cot, which stood close by the head of her own bed, and then she removed a handkerchief which lay upon the child's face.

"Oh, Hugh! oh, Hugh!" she said, and, throwing her arms round his neck, she wept violently upon his breast. For a few moments he did not disturb her, but stood looking at his boy's face. "Hugh, Hugh," she repeated, will you not be kind to me? Do be kind to me. It is not my fault that we are childless."

Still he endured her for a few moments longer. He spoke no word to her, but he let her remain there, with her head upon his breast.

"Dear Hugh, I love you so truly!"

"This is nonsense," said he, "sheer nonsense." His voice was low and very hoarse. "Why do you talk of kindness now?"

"Because I am so wretched."

"What have I done to make you wretched?"

"I do not mean that; but if you will be gentle with me it will comfort me. Do not leave me here all alone, now my darling has been taken from me."

Then he shook her from him, not violently, but with a persistent action.

"Do you mean that you want to go up to town?" he said.

"Oh, no; not that."

"Then what is it you want? Where would you live, if not here?"

"Anywhere you please, only that you should stay with me."

"All that is nonsense. I wonder that you should talk of such things now. Come away from this, and let me go to my room. All this is trash and nonsense, and I hate it." She put back with careful hands the piece of cambric which she had moved, and then, seating herself on a chair, wept violently, with her hands closed upon her face. "That comes of bringing me here," he said. "Get up, Hermione. I will not have you so foolish. Get up, I say. I will have the room closed till the men come."

"Oh, no!"

"Get up, I say, and come away." Then she rose, and followed him out of the chamber, and when he went to change his clothes she returned to the room in which he had found her. There she sat and wept, while he went down and dined and drank alone. But the old housekeeper brought her up a morsel of food and a glass of wine, saying that her master desired that she would take it.

"I will not leave you, my lady, till you have done so," said Hannah. "To fast so long must be bad always."

Then she ate the food, and drank a drop of wine, and allowed the old woman to take her away to the bed that had been prepared for her. Of her husband she saw no more for four days. On the next morning a note was brought to her, in which Sir Hugh told her that he had returned to London. It was necessary, he said, that he should see his lawyer and his brother. He and Archie would return for the funeral. With reference to that he had already given orders.

During the next three days, and till her husband's return, Lady Clavering remained at the rectory, and in the comfort of Mrs. Clavering's presence she almost felt that it would be well for her if those days could be prolonged. But she knew the hour at which her husband would return, and she took care to be at home when he arrived. "You will come and see him?" she said to the rector, as she left the parsonage. "You will come at once; — in an hour or two?" Mr. Clavering remembered the circumstances of his last visit to the house, and the declaration he had then made that he would not return there. But all that could not now be considered.

"Yes," he said, "I will come across this evening. But you had better tell him, so that he need not be troubled to see me if he would rather be alone."

"Oh, he will see you. Of course he will see you. And you will not remember that he ever offended you?"

Mrs. Clavering had written both to Julia and to Harry, and the day of the funeral had been settled. Harry had already communicated his intention of coming down; and Lady Ongar had replied to Mrs. Clavering's letter, saying that she could not now offer to go to Clavering Park, but that if her sister would go elsewhere with her, — to some place, perhaps, on the sea-side, — she would be glad to accompany her; and she used many arguments in her letter to show that such an arrangement as this had better be made.

"You will be with my sister," she had said; "and she will understand why I do not write to her myself, and will not think that it comes from coldness." This had been written before Lady Ongar saw Harry Clavering

"Mr. Clavering, when he got to the great house, was immediately shown into the room in which the baronet and his younger brother were sitting. They had, some time since, finished dinner, but the decanters were still on the table before them. "Hugh," said the rector, walking up to his elder nephew, briskly, "I grieve for you. I grieve for you from the bottom of my heart."

"Yes," said Hugh, "it has been a heavy blow. Sit down, uncle. There is a clean glass there; or Archie will fetch you one." Then Archie looked out a clean glass and passed the decanter; but of this the rector took no direct notice.

"It has been a blow, my poor boy, — a heavy blow," said the rector. "None heavier could have fallen. But our sorrows come from Heaven, as do our blessings, and must be accepted."

"We are all like grass," said Archie, "and must be cut down in our turns." Archie, in saying this, intended to put on his best behaviour. He was as sincere as he knew how to be.

"Come, Archie, none of that," said his brother. "It is my uncle's trade."

"Hugh," said the rector, "unless you can think of it so, you will find no comfort."

"And I expect none, so there is an end of that. Different people think of these things differently, you know, and it is of no more use for me to bother you than it is for you to bother me. My boy has gone, and I know that he will not come back to me. I shall never have another, and it is hard to bear. But, meaning no offence to you, I would sooner be left to bear it in my own way. If I were to talk about the

grass as Archie did just now, it would be humbug, and I hate humbug. No offence to you. Take some wine, uncle."

But the rector could not drink wine in that presence, and therefore he escaped as soon as he could. He spoke one word of intended comfort to Lady Clavering, and then returned to the rectory.

CHAPTER XXI.

Yes; Wrong; — Certainly Wrong.

HARRY CLAVERING had heard the news of his little cousin's death before he went to Bolton Street to report the result of his negotiation with the count. His mother's letter with the news had come to him in the morning, and on the same evening he called on Lady Ongar. She also had then received Mrs. Clavering's letter, and knew what had occurred at the park. Harry found her alone, having asked the servant whether Madame Gordeloup was with his mistress. Had such been the case he would have gone away, and left his message untold.

As he entered the room his mind was naturally full of the tidings from Clavering. Count Pateroff and his message had lost some of their importance through this other event, and the emptiness of the childless house was the first subject of conversation between him and Lady Ongar. "I pity my sister greatly," said she. "I feel for her as deeply as I should have done had nothing occurred to separate us; — but I cannot feel for him."

"I do," said Harry.

"He is your cousin, and perhaps has been your friend?"

"No, not especially. He and I have never pulled well together; but still I pity him deeply."

"He is not my cousin, but I know him better than you do, Harry. He will not feel much himself, and his sorrow will be for his heir, not for his son. He is a man whose happiness does not depend on the life or death of any one. He likes some people, as he once liked me; but I do not think that he ever loved any human being. He will get over it, and he will simply wish that Hermy may die, that he may marry another wife. Harry, I know him so well!"

"Archie will marry now," said Harry.

"Yes; if he can get any one to have him. There are very few men who can't get wives, but I can fancy Archie Clavering to be one of them. He has not humility enough to ask the sort of girl who would be glad to take him. Now, with his improved prospects, he will want a royal princess, or something not much short of it. Money, rank, and blood might have done before, but he'll expect youth, beauty, and wit now, as well as the other things. He may marry after all, for he is just the man to walk out of a church some day with the cookmaid under his arm as his wife."

"Perhaps he may find something between a princess and a cookmaid."

"I hope, for your sake, he may not; — neither a princess nor a cookmaid, nor anything between."

"He has my leave to marry to-morrow, Lady Ongar. If I had my wish, Hugh should have his house full of children."

"Of course that is the proper thing to say, Harry."

"I won't stand that from you, Lady Ongar. What I say, I mean; and no one knows that better than you."

"Won't you, Harry? From whom, then, if not from me? But come, I will do you justice, and believe you to be simple enough to wish anything of the kind. The sort of castle in the air which you build, is not one to be had by inheritance, but to be taken by storm. You must fight for it."

"Or work for it."

"Or win it in some way off your own bat; and no lord ever sat prouder in his castle than you sit in those that you build from day to day in your imagination. And you sally forth and do all manner of magnificent deeds. You help distressed damsels, — poor me, for instance; and you attack enormous dragons; — shall I say that Sophie Gordeloup is the latest dragon? — and you wish well to your enemies, such as Hugh and Archie; and you cut down enormous forests, which means your coming miracles as an engineer; — and then you fall gloriously in love. When is that last to be, Harry?"

"I suppose, according to all precedent, that must be done with the distressed damsel," he said, — fool that he was.

"No, Harry, no; you shall take your young fresh generous heart to a better market than that; not but that the distressed damsel will ever remember what might once have been."

He knew that he was playing on the edge of a precipice, — that he was fluttering as a moth round a candle. He knew that it behoved him now at once to tell her all his tale as to Stratton and Florence

Burton; — that if he could tell it now, the pang would be over and the danger gone. But he did not tell it. Instead of telling it he thought of Lady Ongar's beauty, of his own early love, of what might have been his had he not gone to Stratton. I think he thought, if not of her wealth, yet of the power and place which would have been his were it now open to him to ask her for her hand. When he had declared that he did not want his cousin's inheritance, he had spoken the simple truth. He was not covetous of another's money. Were Archie to marry as many wives as Henry, and have as many children as Priam, it would be no offence to him. His desires did not lie in that line. But in this other case, the woman before him who would so willingly have endowed him with all that she possessed, had been loved by him before he had ever seen Florence Burton. In all his love for Florence, — so he now told himself, but so told himself falsely, — he had ever remembered that Julia Brabazon had been his first love, the love whom he had loved with all his heart. But things had gone with him most unfortunately, — with a misfortune that had never been paralleled. It was thus he was thinking instead of remembering that now was the time in which his tale should be told.

Lady Ongar, however, soon carried him away from the actual brink of the precipice. "But how about the dragon," she said, "or rather about the dragon's brother, at whom you were bound to go and tilt on my behalf? Have you tilted, or are you a recreant knight?"

"I have tilted," said he, "but the he-dragon pro-

fesses that he will not regard himself as killed. In other words he declares that he will see you."

"That he will see me?" said Lady Ongar, and as she spoke there came an angry spot on each cheek. "Does he send me that message as a threat?"

"He does not send it as a threat, but I think he partly means it so."

"He will find, Harry, that I will not see him; and that should he force himself into my presence, I shall know how to punish such an outrage. If he sent me any message, let me know it."

"To tell the truth he was most unwilling to speak to me at all, though he was anxious to be civil to me. When I had inquired for him some time in vain, he came to me with another man, and asked me to dinner. So I went, and as there were four of us, of course I could not speak to him then. He still had the other man, a foreigner —"

"Colonel Schmoff, perhaps?"

"Yes; Colonel Schmoff. He kept Colonel Schmoff by him, so as to guard him from being questioned."

"That is so like him. Everything he does he does with some design, — with some little plan. Well, Harry, you might have ignored Colonel Schmoff for what I should have cared."

"I got the count to come out into another room at last, and then he was very angry, — with me, you know, — and talked of what he would do to men who interfered with him."

"You will not quarrel with him, Harry? Promise me that there shall be no nonsense of that sort, — no fighting."

"Oh, no; we were friends again very soon. But

he bade me tell you that there was something important for him to say and for you to hear, which was no concern of mine, and which required an interview."

"I do not believe him, Harry."

"And he said that he had once been very courteous to you —"

"Yes; once insolent, — and once courteous. I have forgiven the one for the other."

"He then went on to say that you made him a poor return for his civility by shutting your door in his face, but that he did not doubt you would think better of it when you had heard his message. Therefore, he said, he should call again. That, Lady Ongar, was the whole of it."

"Shall I tell you what his intention was, Harry?" Again her face became red as she asked this question; but the colour which now came to her cheeks was rather that of shame than of anger.

"What was his intention?"

"To make you believe that I am in his power; to make you think that he has been my lover; to lower me in your eyes, so that you might believe all that others have believed, — all that Hugh Clavering has pretended to believe. That has been his object, Harry, and perhaps you will tell me what success he has had."

"Lady Ongar!"

"You know the old story, that the drop which is ever dropping will wear the stone. And after all why should your faith in me be as hard even as a stone?"

"Do you believe that what he said had any such effect?"

"It is very hard to look into another person's heart; and the dearer and nearer that heart is to your own, the greater, I think, is the difficulty. I know that man's heart, — what he calls his heart; but I don't know yours."

For a moment or two Clavering made no answer, and then, when he did speak, he went back from himself to the count.

"If what you surmise of him be true, he must be a very devil. He cannot be a man —"

"Man or devil, what matters which he be? Which is the worst, Harry, and what is the difference? The Fausts of this day want no Mephistopheles to teach them guile or to harden their hearts."

"I do not believe that there are such men. There may be one."

"One, Harry! What was Lord Ongar? What is your cousin Hugh? What is this Count Pateroff? Are they not all of the same nature; hard as stone, desirous simply of indulging their own appetites, utterly without one generous feeling, incapable even of the idea of caring for any one? Is it not so? In truth this count is the best of the three I have named. With him a woman would stand a better chance than with either of the others."

"Nevertheless, if that was his motive, he is a devil."

"He shall be a devil if you say so. He shall be anything you please, so long as he has not made you think evil of me."

"No; he has not done that."

"Then I don't care what he has done, or what he may do. You would not have me see him, would

you?" This she asked with a sudden energy, throwing herself forward from her seat with her elbows on the table, and resting her face on her hands, as she had already done more than once when he had been there; so that the attitude, which became her well, was now customary in his eyes.

"You will hardly be guided by my opinion in such a matter."

"By whose, then, will I be guided? Nay, Harry, since you put me to a promise, I will make the promise. I will be guided by your opinion. If you bid me see him, I will do it, — though, I own, it would be distressing to me."

"Why should you see him, if you do not wish it?"

"I know no reason. In truth there is no reason. What he says about Lord Ongar is simply some part of his scheme. You see what his scheme is, Harry?"

"What is his scheme?"

"Simply this — that I should be frightened into becoming his wife. My darling bosom friend Sophie, who, as I take it, has not quite managed to come to satisfactory terms with her brother, — and I have no doubt her price for assistance has been high, — has informed me more than once that her brother desires to do me so much honour. The count, perhaps, thinks that he can manage such a bagatelle without any aid from his sister; and my dearest Sophie seems to feel that she can do better with me herself in my widowed state, than if I were to take another husband. They are so kind and so affectionate; are they not?"

At this moment tea was brought in, and Clavering

sat for a time silent with his cup in his hand. She, the meanwhile, had resumed the old position with her face upon her hands, which she had abandoned when the servant entered the room, and was now sitting looking at him as he sipped his tea with his eyes averted from her. "I cannot understand," at last he said, "why you should persist in your intimacy with such a woman."

"You have not thought about it, Harry, or you would understand it. It is, I think, very easily understood."

"You know her to be treacherous, false, vulgar, covetous, unprincipled. You cannot like her. You say she is a dragon."

"A dragon to you, I said."

"You cannot pretend that she is a lady, and yet you put up with her society."

"Exactly. And now tell me what you would have me do."

"I would have you part from her."

"But how? It is so easy to say, part. Am I to bar my door against her when she has given me no offence? Am I to forget that she did me great service, when I sorely needed such services? Can I tell her to her face that she is all these things that you say of her, and that therefore I will for the future dispense with her company? Or do you believe that people in this world associate only with those they love and esteem?"

"I would not have one for my intimate friend whom I did not love and esteem."

"But, Harry, suppose that no one loved and esteemed you; that you had no home down at Claverings with a

father that admires you and a mother that worships you; no sisters that think you to be almost perfect, no comrades with whom you can work with mutual regard and emulation, no self-confidence, no high hopes of your own, no power of choosing companions whom you can esteem and love; — suppose with you it was Sophie Gordeloup or none, — how would it be with you then?"

His heart must have been made of stone if this had not melted it. He got up and coming round to her stood over her. "Julia," he said, "it is not so with you."

"But it is so with Julia," she said. "That is the truth. How am I better than her, and why should I not associate with her?"

"Better than her! As women you are poles asunder."

"But as dragons," she said smiling, "we come together."

"Do you mean that you have no one to love you?"

"Yes, Harry; that is just what I do mean. I have none to love me. In playing my cards I have won my stakes in money and rank, but have lost the amount ten times told in affection, friendship, and that general unpronounced esteem which creates the fellowship of men and women in the world. I have a carriage and horses. and am driven about with grand servants; and people, as they see me, whisper and say that is Lady Ongar, whom nobody knows. I can see it in their eyes till I fancy that I can hear their words."

"But it is all false."

"What is false? It is not false that I have de-

served this. I have done that which has made me a fitting companion for such a one as Sophie Gordeloup, though I have not done that which perhaps these people think."

He paused again before he spoke, still standing near her on the rug. "Lady Ongar —" he said.

"Nay, Harry; not Lady Ongar when we are together thus. Let me feel that I have one friend who can dare to call me by my name, — from whose mouth I shall be pleased to hear my name. You need not fear that I shall think that it means too much. I will not take it as meaning what it used to mean."

He did not know how to go on with his speech, or in truth what to say to her. Florence Burton was still present to his mind, and from minute to minute he told himself that he would not become a villain. But now it had come to that with him, that he would have given all that he had in the world that he had never gone to Stratton. He sat down by her in silence, looking away from her at the fire, swearing to himself that he would not become a villain, and yet wishing, almost wishing, that he had the courage to throw his honour overboard. At last, half turning round towards her, he took her hand, or rather took her first by the wrist till he could possess himself of her hand. As he did so he touched her hair and her cheek, and she let her hand drop till it rested in his. "Julia," he said, "what can I do to comfort you?" She did not answer him, but looked away from him as she sat, across the table into vacancy. "Julia," he said again, "is there anything that will comfort you?" But still she did not answer him.

He understood it all as well as the reader will

understand it. He knew how it was with her, and was aware that he was at this instant false almost equally to her and to Florence. He knew that the question he had asked was one to which there could be made a true and satisfactory answer, but that his safety lay in the fact that that answer was all but impossible for her to give. Could she say, "Yes, you can comfort me. Tell me that you yet love me, and I will be comforted?" But he had not designed to bring her into such difficulty as this. He had not intended to be cruel. He had drifted into treachery unawares, and was torturing her, not because he was wicked, but because he was weak. He had held her hand now for some minute or two, but still she did not speak to him. Then he raised it and pressed it warmly to his lips.

"No, Harry," she said, jumping from her seat and drawing her hand rapidly from him; "no; it shall not be like that. Let it be Lady Ongar again if the sound of the other name brings back too closely the memory of other days. Let it be Lady Ongar again. I can understand that it will be better." As she spoke she walked away from him across the room, and he followed her.

"Are you angry?" he asked her.

"No, Harry; not angry. How should I be angry with you who alone are left to me of my old friends? But, Harry, you must think for me, and spare me in my difficulty."

"Spare you, Julia?"

"Yes, Harry, spare me; you must be good to me and considerate, and make yourself like a brother to me. But people will know you are not a brother, and

you must remember all that for my sake. But you must not leave me or desert me. Anything that people might say would be better than that."

"Was I wrong to kiss your hand?"

"Yes, wrong, certainly wrong; — that is, not wrong, but unmindful."

"I did it," he said, "because I love you." And as he spoke the tears stood in both his eyes.

"Yes; you love me, and I you; but not with love that may show itself in that form. That was the old love, which I threw away, and which has been lost. That was at an end when I — jilted you. I am not angry; but you will remember that that love exists no longer? You will remember that, Harry?"

He sat himself down in a chair in a far part of the room, and two tears coursed their way down his cheeks. She stood over him and watched him as he wept. "I did not mean to make you sad," she said. "Come, we will be sad no longer. I understand it all. I know how it is with you. The old love is lost, but we will not the less be friends." Then he rose suddenly from his chair, and taking her in his arms, and holding her closely to his bosom, pressed his lips to hers.

He was so quick in this that she had not the power, even if she had the wish, to restrain him. But she struggled in his arms, and held her face aloof from him as she gently rebuked his passion. "No, Harry, no; not so," she said, "it must not be so."

"Yes, Julia, yes; it shall be so; ever so, — always so." And he was still holding her in his arms, when the door opened, and with stealthy, cat-like steps Sophie Gordeloup entered the room. Harry imme-

diately retreated from his position, and Lady Ongar turned upon her friend, and glared upon her with angry eyes.

"Ah," said the little Franco-Pole, with an expression of infinite delight on her detestable visage, "ah, my dears, is it not well that I thus announce myself?"

"No," said Lady Ongar, "it is not well. It is anything but well."

"And why not well, Julie? Come, do not be foolish. Mr. Clavering is only a cousin, and a very handsome cousin, too. What does it signify before me?"

"It signifies nothing before you," said Lady Ongar.

"But before the servant, Julie —?"

"It would signify nothing before anybody."

"Come, come, Julie dear; that is nonsense."

"Nonsense or no nonsense, I would wish to be private when I please. Will you tell me, Madame Gordeloup, what is your pleasure at the present moment?"

"My pleasure is to beg your pardon and to say you must forgive your poor friend. Your fine manservant is out, and Bessy let me in. I told Bessy I would go up by myself, and that is all. If I have come too late I beg pardon."

"Not too late, certainly, — as I am still up."

"And I wanted to ask you about the pictures to-morrow? You said, perhaps you would go to-morrow, — perhaps not."

Clavering had found himself to be somewhat awkwardly situated while Madame Gordeloup was thus explaining the causes of her having come unannounced

into the room; as soon, therefore, as he found it practicable, he took his leave. "Julia," he said, "as Madame Gordeloup is with you, I will now go."

"But you will let me see you soon?"

"Yes, very soon; that is, as soon as I return from Clavering. I leave town early to-morrow morning."

"Good-by, then," and she put out her hand to him frankly, smiling sweetly on him. As he felt the warm pressure of her hand he hardly knew whether to return it or to reject it. But he had gone too far now for retreat, and he held it firmly for a moment in his own. She smiled again upon him, oh! so passionately, and nodded her head at him. He had never, he thought, seen a woman look so lovely, or more light of heart. How different was her countenance now from that she had worn when she told him, earlier on that fatal evening, of all the sorrows that made her wretched! That nod of hers said so much. "We understand each other now, — do we not? Yes; although this spiteful woman has for the moment come between us, we understand each other. And is it not sweet? Ah! the troubles of which I told you; — you, you have cured them all." All that had been said plainly in her farewell salutation, and Harry had not dared to contradict it by any expression of his countenance.

"By, by, Mr. Claverin," said Sophie.

"Good evening, Madame Gordeloup," said Harry, turning upon her a look of bitter anger. Then he went, leaving the two women together, and walked home to Bloomsbury Square, — not with the heart of a joyous thriving lover.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Day of the Funeral.

HARRY CLAVERING, when he walked away from Bolton Street after the scene in which he had been interrupted by Sophie Gordeloup, was not in a happy frame of mind, nor did he make his journey down to Clavering with much comfort to himself. Whether or no he was now to be regarded as a villain, at any rate he was not a villain capable of doing his villany without extreme remorse and agony of mind. It did not seem to him to be even yet possible that he should be altogether untrue to Florence. It hardly occurred to him to think that he could free himself from the contract by which he was bound to her. No; it was towards Lady Ongar that his treachery must be exhibited; — towards the woman whom he had sworn to befriend, and whom he now, in his distress, imagined to be the dearer to him of the two. He should, according to his custom, have written to Florence a day or two before he left London, and, as he went to Bolton Street, had determined to do so that evening on his return home; but when he reached his rooms he found it impossible to write such a letter. What could he say to her that would not be false? How could he tell her that he loved her, and speak as he was wont to do of his impatience, after that which had just occurred in Bolton Street?

But what was he to do in regard to Julia? He was bound to let her know at once what was his position, and to tell her that in treating her as he had treated her, he had simply insulted her. That look of gratified contentment with which she had greeted him

as he was leaving her, clung to his memory and tormented him. Of that contentment he must now rob her, and he was bound to do so with as little delay as was possible. Early in the morning before he started on his journey he did make an attempt, a vain attempt, to write, not to Florence but to Julia. The letter would not get itself written. He had not the hardihood to inform her that he had amused himself with her sorrows, and that he had injured her by the exhibition of his love. And then that horrid Franco-Pole, whose prying eyes Julia had dared to disregard, because she had been proud of his love! If she had not been there, the case might have been easier. Harry, as he thought of this, forgot to remind himself that if Sophie had not interrupted him he would have floundered on from one danger to another till he would have committed himself more thoroughly even than he had done, and have made promises which it would have been as shameful to break as it would be to keep them. But even as it was, had he not made such promises? Was there not such a promise in that embrace, in the half-forgotten word or two which he had spoken while she was in his arms, and in the parting grasp of his hand? He could not write that letter then, on that morning, hurried as he was with the necessity of his journey; and he started for Clavering resolving that it should be written from his father's house.

It was a tedious, sad journey to him, and he was silent and out of spirits when he reached his home; but he had gone there for the purpose of his cousin's funeral, and his mood was not at first noticed, as it might have been had the occasion been different. His

father's countenance wore that well-known look of customary solemnity which is found to be necessary on such occasions, and his mother was still thinking of the sorrows of Lady Clavering, who had been at the rectory for the last day or two.

"Have you seen Lady Ongar since she heard of the poor child's death?" his mother asked.

"Yes, I was with her yesterday evening."

"Do you see her often?" Fanny inquired.

"What do you call often? No; not often. I went to her last night because she had given me a commission. I have seen her three or four times altogether."

"Is she as handsome as she used to be?" said Fanny.

"I cannot tell; I do not know."

"You used to think her very handsome, Harry."

"Of course she is handsome. There has never been a doubt about that; but when a woman is in deep mourning one hardly thinks about her beauty." Oh, Harry, Harry, how could you be so false?

"I thought young widows were always particularly charming," said Fanny; "and when one remembers about Lord Ongar one does not think of her being a widow so much as one would do if he had been different."

"I don't know anything about that," said he. He felt that he was stupid, and that he blundered in every word, but he could not help himself. It was impossible that he should talk about Lady Ongar with proper composure. Fanny saw that the subject annoyed him and that it made him cross, and she therefore ceased. "She wrote a very nice letter to your mother about

the poor child, and about her sister," said the rector. "I wish with all my heart that Hermione could go to her for a time."

"I fear that he will not let her," said Mrs. Clavering. "I do not understand it all, but Hermione says that the rancour between Hugh and her sister is stronger now than ever."

"And Hugh will not be the first to put rancour out of his heart," said the rector.

On the following day was the funeral and Harry went with his father and cousins to the child's grave. When he met Sir Hugh in the dining-room in the Great House the baronet hardly spoke to him. "A sad occasion; is it not?" said Archie; "very sad; very sad." Then Harry could see that Hugh scowled at his brother angrily, hating his humbug, and hating it the more because in Archie's case it was doubly humbug. Archie was now heir to the property and to the title.

After the funeral Harry went to see Lady Clavering, and again had to endure a conversation about Lady Ongar. Indeed, he had been specially commissioned by Julia to press upon her sister the expediency of leaving Clavering for a while. This had been early on that last evening in Bolton Street, long before Madame Gordeloup had made her appearance. "Tell her from me," Lady Ongar had said, "that I will go anywhere that she may wish if she will go with me, — she and I alone; and, Harry, tell her this as though I meant it. I do mean it. She will understand why I do not write myself. I know that he sees all her letters when he is with her." This task Harry was now to perform, and the result he was bound to com-

municate to Lady Ongar. The message he might give; but delivering the answer to Lady Ongar would be another thing.

Lady Clavering listened to what he said, but when he pressed her for a reply she shook her head. "And why not, Lady Clavering?"

"People can't always leave their houses and go away, Harry."

"But I should have thought that you could have done so now; — that is, before long. Will Sir Hugh remain here at Clavering?"

"He has not told me that he means to go."

"If he stays, I suppose you will stay; but if he goes up to London again, I cannot see why you and your sister should not go away together. She mentioned Tenby as being very quiet, but she would be guided by you in that altogether."

"I do not think it will be possible, Harry. Tell her with my love, that I am truly obliged to her, but that I do not think it will be possible. She is free, you know, to do what she pleases."

"Yes, she is free. But do you mean —?"

"I mean, Harry, that I had better stay where I am. What is the use of a scene, and of being refused at last? Do not say more about it, but tell her that it cannot be so." This Harry promised to do, and after a while was rising to go, when she suddenly asked him a question. "Do you remember what I was saying about Julia and Archie when you were here last?"

"Yes; I remember."

"Well, would he have a chance? It seems that you see more of her now than any one else."

"No chance at all, I should say." And Harry, as he answered, could not repress a feeling of most unreasonable jealousy.

"Ah, you have always thought little of Archie. Archie's position is changed now, Harry, since my darling was taken from me. Of course he will marry, and Hugh, I think, would like him to marry Julia. It was he proposed it. He never likes anything unless he has proposed it himself."

"It was he proposed the marriage with Lady Ongar. Does he like that?"

"Well; you know, Julia has got her money." Harry, as he heard this, turned away sick at heart. The poor baby whose mother was now speaking to him, had only been buried that morning, and she was already making fresh schemes for family wealth. Julia has got her money! That had seemed to her, even in her sorrow, to be sufficient compensation for all that her sister had endured and was enduring. Poor soul! Harry did not reflect as he should have done, that in all her schemes she was only scheming for that peace which might perhaps come to her if her husband were satisfied. "And why should not Julia take him?" she asked.

"I cannot tell why, but she never will," said Harry, almost in anger. At that moment the door was opened, and Sir Hugh came into the room. "I did not know that you were here," Sir Hugh said, turning to the visitor.

"I could not be down here without saying a few words to Lady Clavering."

"The less said the better, I suppose, just at present," said Sir Hugh. But there was no offence in the

tone of his voice, or in his countenance, and Harry took the words as meaning none.

"I was telling Lady Clavering that as soon as she can, she would be better if she left home for awhile."

"And why should you tell Lady Clavering that?"

"I have told him that I would not go," said the poor woman.

"Why should she go, and where; and why have you proposed it? And how does it come to pass that her going or not going, should be a matter of solicitude to you?" Now, as Sir Hugh asked these questions of his cousin, there was much of offence in his tone, — of intended offence, — and in his eye, and in all his bearing. He had turned his back upon his wife, and was looking full into Harry's face. "Lady Clavering, no doubt, is much obliged to you," he said, "but why is it that you specially have interfered to recommend her to leave her home at such a time as this?"

Harry had not spoken as he did to Sir Hugh without having made some calculation in his own mind as to the result of what he was about to say. He did not, as regarded himself, care for his cousin or his cousin's anger. His object at present was simply that of carrying out Lady Ongar's wish, and he had thought that perhaps Sir Hugh might not object to the proposal which his wife was too timid to make to him.

"It was a message from her sister," said Harry, "sent by me."

"Upon my word she is very kind. And what was the message, — unless it be a secret between you three?"

"I have had no secret, Hugh," said his wife.

"Let me hear what he has to say," said Sir Hugh.

"Lady Ongar thought that it might be well that her sister should leave Clavering for a short time, and has offered to go anywhere with her for a few weeks. That is all."

"And why the devil should Hermione leave her own house? And if she were to leave it, why should she go with a woman that has misconducted herself?"

"Oh, Hugh!" exclaimed Lady Clavering.

"Lady Ongar has never misconducted herself," said Harry.

"Are you her champion?" asked Sir Hugh.

"As far as that, I am. She has never misconducted herself; and what is more, she has been cruelly used since she came home."

"By whom; by whom?" said Sir Hugh, stepping close up to his cousin and looking with angry eyes into his face.

But Harry Clavering was not a man to be intimidated by the angry eyes of any man. "By you," he said, "her brother-in-law; — by you, who made up her wretched marriage, and who, of all others, were the most bound to protect her."

"Oh, Harry, don't, don't!" shrieked Lady Clavering.

"Hermione, hold your tongue," said the imperious husband; "or, rather, go away and leave us. I have a word or two to say to Harry Clavering, which had better be said in private."

"I will not go if you are going to quarrel."

"Harry," said Sir Hugh, "I will trouble you to go downstairs before me. If you will step into the breakfast-room I will come to you."

Harry Clavering did as he was bid, and in a few minutes was joined by his cousin in the breakfast-room.

"No doubt you intended to insult me by what you said upstairs." The baronet began in this way after he had carefully shut the door, and had slowly walked up to the rug before the fire, and had there taken his position.

"Not at all; I intended to take the part of an ill-used woman whom you had calumniated."

"Now look here, Harry, I will have no interference on your part in my affairs, either here or elsewhere. You are a very fine fellow, no doubt, but it is not part of your business to set me or my house in order. After what you have just said before Lady Clavering, you will do well not to come here in my absence."

"Neither in your absence nor in your presence."

"As to the latter you may do as you please. And now touching my sister-in-law, I will simply recommend you to look after your own affairs."

"I shall look after what affairs I please."

"Of Lady Ongar and her life since her marriage I daresay you know as little as anybody in the world, and I do not suppose it likely that you will learn much from her. She made a fool of you once, and it is on the cards that she may do so again."

"You said just now that you would brook no interference in your affairs. Neither will I."

"I don't know that you have any affairs in which any one can interfere. I have been given to understand that you are engaged to marry that young lady whom your mother brought here one day to dinner. If that be so, I do not see how you can reconcile it to

yourself to become the champion, as you call it, of Lady Ongar."

"I never said anything of the kind."

"Yes, you did."

"No; it was you who asked me whether I was her champion."

"And you said you were."

"So far as to defend her name when I heard it traduced by you."

"By heavens, your impudence is beautiful. Who knows her best, do you think, — you or I? Whose sister-in-law is she? You have told me I was cruel to her. Now to that I will not submit, and I require you to apologize to me."

"I have no apology to make, and nothing to retract."

"Then I shall tell your father of your gross misconduct, and shall warn him that you have made it necessary for me to turn his son out of my house. You are an impertinent, overbearing puppy, and if your name were not the same as my own, I would tell the grooms to horsewhip you off the place."

"Which order, you know, the grooms would not obey. They would a deal sooner horsewhip you. Sometimes I think they will, when I hear you speak to them."

"Now go!"

"Of course I shall go. What would keep me here?"

Sir Hugh then opened the door, and Harry passed through it, not without a cautious look over his shoulder, so that he might be on his guard if any violence were contemplated. But Hugh knew better

than that, and allowed his cousin to walk out of the room, and out of the house, unmolested.

And this had happened on the day of the funeral! Harry Clavering had quarrelled thus with the father within a few hours of the moment in which they two had stood together over the grave of that father's only child! As he thought of this while he walked across the park he became sick at heart. How vile, wretched and miserable was the world around him! How terribly vicious were the people with whom he was dealing! And what could he think of himself, — of himself, who was engaged to Florence Burton, and engaged also, as he certainly was, to Lady Ongar? Even his cousin had rebuked him for his treachery to Florence; but what would his cousin have said had he known all? And then what good had he done; — or rather, what evil had he not done? In his attempt on behalf of Lady Clavering had he not, in truth, interfered without proper excuse, and fairly laid himself open to anger from his cousin? And he felt that he had been an ass, a fool, a conceited ass, thinking that he could produce good, when his interference could be efficacious only for evil. Why could he not have held his tongue when Sir Hugh came in, instead of making that vain suggestion as to Lady Clavering? But even this trouble was but an addition to the great trouble that overwhelmed him. How was he to escape the position which he had made for himself in reference to Lady Ongar? As he had left London he had promised to himself that he would write to her that same night and tell her everything as to Florence; but the night had passed, and the next day was nearly gone, and no such letter had been written.

As he sat with his father that evening, he told the story of his quarrel with his cousin. His father shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows. "You are a bolder man than I am," he said. "I certainly should not have dared to advise Hugh as to what he should do with his wife."

"But I did not advise him. I only said that I had been talking to her about it. If he were to say to you that he had been recommending my mother to do this or that, you would not take it amiss."

"But Hugh is a peculiar man."

"No man has a right to be peculiar. Every man is bound to accept such usage as is customary in the world."

"I don't suppose that it will signify much," said the rector. "To have your cousin's doors barred against you, either here or in London, will not injure you."

"Oh, no; it will not injure me; but I do not wish you to think that I have been unreasonable."

The night went by and so did the next day, and still the letter did not get itself written. On the third morning after the funeral he heard that Sir Hugh had gone away; but he, of course, did not go up to the house, remembering well that he had been warned by the master not to do so in the master's absence. His mother, however, went to Lady Clavering, and some intercourse between the families was renewed. He had intended to stay but one day after the funeral, but at the end of a week he was still at the rectory. It was Whitsuntide he said, and he might as well take his holiday as he was down there. Of course they were glad that he should remain with them, but they did

not fail to perceive that things with him were not altogether right; nor had Fanny failed to perceive that he had not once mentioned Florence's name since he had been at the rectory.

"Harry," she said, "there is nothing wrong between you and Florence?"

"Wrong! what should there be wrong? What do you mean by wrong?"

"I had a letter from her to-day and she asks where you are."

"Women expect such a lot of letter-writing! But I have been remiss I know. I got out of my business way of doing things when I came down here and have neglected it. Do you write to her to-morrow, and tell her that she shall hear from me directly I get back to town."

"But why should you not write to her from here?"

"Because I can get you to do it for me."

Fanny felt that this was not at all like a lover, and not at all like such a lover as her brother had been. While Florence had been at Clavering he had been most constant with his letters, and Fanny had often heard Florence boast of them as being perfect in their way. She did not say anything further at the present moment, but she knew that things were not altogether right. Things were by no means right. He had written neither to Lady Ongar nor to Florence, and the longer he put off the task the more burdensome did it become. He was now telling himself that he would write to neither till he got back to London.

On the day before he went, there came to him a letter from Stratton. Fanny was with him when he received it, and observed that he put it into his pocket

without opening it. In his pocket he carried it unopened half the day, till he was ashamed of his own weakness. At last, almost in despair with himself, he broke the seal and forced himself to read it. There was nothing in it that need have alarmed him. It contained hardly a word that was intended for a rebuke.

"I wonder why you should have been two whole weeks without writing," she said. "It seems so odd to me, because you have spoiled me by your customary goodness. I know that other men when they are engaged do not trouble themselves with constant letter-writing. Even Theodore, who according to Cecilia is perfect, would not write to her then very often; and now, when he is away, his letters are only three lines. I suppose you are teaching me not to be exacting. If so, I will kiss the rod like a good child; but I feel it the more because the lesson has not come soon enough."

Then she went on in her usual strain, telling him of what she had done, what she had read, and what she had thought. There was no suspicion in her letter, no fear, no hint at jealousy. And she should have no further cause for jealousy! One of the two must be sacrificed, and it was most fitting that Julia should be the sacrifice. Julia should be sacrificed, — Julia and himself! But still he could not write to Florence till he had written to Julia. He could not bring himself to send soft, pretty, loving words to one woman while the other was still regarding him as her affianced lover.

"Was your letter from Florence this morning?" Fanny asked him.

"Yes; it was."

"Had she received mine?"

"I don't know. Of course she had. If you sent it by post of course she got it."

"She might have mentioned it, perhaps."

"I daresay she did. I don't remember."

"Well, Harry; you need not be cross with me because I love the girl who is going to be your wife. You would not like it if I did not care about her."

"I hate being called cross."

"Suppose I were to say that I hated your being cross. I'm sure I do; — and you are going away to-morrow, too. You have hardly said a nice word to me since you have been home."

Harry threw himself back into a chair almost in despair. He was not enough a hypocrite to say nice words when his heart within him was not at ease. He could not bring himself to pretend that things were pleasant.

"If you are in trouble, Harry, I will not go on teasing you."

"I am in trouble," he said.

"And cannot I help you?"

"No; you cannot help me. No one can help me. But do not ask any questions."

"Oh, Harry! is it about money?"

"No, no; it has nothing to do with money."

"You have not really quarrelled with Florence?"

"No; I have not quarrelled with her at all. But I will not answer more questions. And, Fanny, do not speak of this to my father or mother. I will be over before long, and then, if possible, I will tell you."

"Harry, you are not going to fight with Hugh?"

"Fight with Hugh! no. Not that I should mind it;

but he is not fool enough for that. If he wanted fighting done, he would do it by deputy. But there is nothing of that kind."

She asked him no more questions, and on the next morning he returned to London. On his table he found a note which he at once knew to be from Lady Ongar, and which had come only that afternoon.

"Come to me at once; — at once." That was all that the note contained.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Cumberly Lane without the Mud.

FANNY CLAVERING, while she was inquiring of her brother about his troubles, had not been without troubles of her own. For some days past she had been aware, — almost aware, — that Mr. Saul's love was not among the things that were past. I am not prepared to say that this conviction on her part was altogether an unalloyed trouble, or that there might have been no faint touch of sadness, of silent melancholy about her, had it been otherwise. But Mr. Saul was undoubtedly a trouble to her; and Mr. Saul with his love in activity would be more troublesome than Mr. Saul with his love in abeyance. "It would be madness either in him or in me," Fanny had said to herself very often; "he has not a shilling in the world." But she thought no more in these days of the awkwardness of his gait, or of his rusty clothes, or his abstracted manner; and for his doings as a clergyman her admiration had become very great. Her mother saw something of all this, and cautioned her; but Fanny's demure manner deceived Mrs. Clavering. "Oh,

mamma, of course I know that anything of the kind must be impossible; and I am sure he does not think of it himself any longer." When she had said this, Mrs. Clavering had believed that it was all right. The reader must not suppose that Fanny had been a hypocrite. There had been no hypocrisy in her words to her mother. At that moment the conviction that Mr. Saul's love was not among past events had not reached her; and as regarded herself, she was quite sincere when she said that anything of the kind must be impossible.

It will be remembered that Florence Burton had advised Mr. Saul to try again, and that Mr. Saul had resolved that he would do so, — resolving, also, that should he try in vain he must leave Clavering, and seek another home. He was a solemn, earnest, thoughtful man; to whom such a matter as this was a phase of life very serious, causing infinite present trouble, nay, causing tribulation, and, to the same extent, capable of causing infinite joy. From day to day he went about his work, seeing her amidst his ministrations almost daily. And never during these days did he say a word to her of his love, — never since that day in which he had plainly pleaded his cause in the muddy lane. To no one but Florence Burton had he since spoken of it, and Florence had certainly been true to her trust; but, notwithstanding all that, Fanny's conviction was very strong.

Florence had counselled Mr. Saul to try again, and Mr. Saul was prepared to make the attempt; but he was a man who allowed himself to do nothing in a hurry. He thought much of the matter before he could prepare himself to recur to the subject; doubting, some-

times, whether he would be right to do so without first speaking to Fanny's father; doubting, afterwards, whether he might not best serve his cause by asking the assistance of Fanny's mother. But he resolved at last that he would depend on himself alone. As to the rector, if his suit to Fanny were a fault against Mr. Clavering as Fanny's father, that fault had been already committed. But Mr. Saul would not admit to himself that it was a fault. I fancy that he considered himself to have, as a gentleman, a right to address himself to any lady with whom he was thrown into close contact. I fancy that he ignored all want of worldly preparation, — never for a moment attempting to place himself on a footing with men who were richer than himself, and, as the world goes, brighter, but still feeling himself to be in no way lower than they. If any woman so lived as to show that she thought his line better than their line, it was open to him to ask such woman to join her lot to his. If he failed, the misfortune was his; and the misfortune, as he well knew, was one which it was hard to bear. And as to the mother, though he had learned to love Mrs. Clavering dearly, — appreciating her kindness to all those around her, her conduct to her husband, her solicitude in the parish, all her genuine goodness, still he was averse to trust to her for any part of his success. Though Mr. Saul was no knight, though he had nothing knightly about him, though he was a poor curate in very rusty clothes and with manner strangely unfitted for much communion with the outer world, still he had a feeling that the spoil which he desired to win should be won by his own spear, and that its triumph would lose half its glory if it were not achieved by his

own prowess. He was no coward, either in such matter as this or in any other. When circumstances demanded that he should speak he could speak his mind freely, with manly vigour, and sometimes not without a certain manly grace.

How did Fanny know that it was coming? She did know it, though he had said nothing to her beyond his usual parish communications. He was often with her in the two schools; often returned with her in the sweet spring evenings along the lane that led back to the rectory from Cumberly Green; often inspected with her the little amounts of parish charities and entries of pence collected from such parents as could pay. He had never reverted to that other subject. But yet Fanny knew that it was coming, and when she had questioned Harry about his troubles she had been thinking also of her own.

It was now the middle of May, and the spring was giving way to the early summer almost before the spring had itself arrived. It is so, I think, in these latter years. The sharpness of March prolongs itself almost through April; and then, while we are still hoping for the spring, there falls upon us suddenly a bright, dangerous, delicious gleam of summer. The lane from Cumberly Green was no longer muddy, and Fanny could go backwards and forwards between the parsonage and her distant school without that wading for which feminine apparel is so unsuited. One evening, just as she had finished her work, Mr. Saul's head appeared at the school-door, and he asked her whether she were about to return home. As soon as she saw his eye and heard his voice, she feared that the day was come. She was prepared with no new answer,

and could only give the answer that she had given before. She had always told herself that it was impossible; and as to all other questions, about her own heart or such like, she had put such questions away from her as being unnecessary, and, perhaps, unseemly. The thing was impossible, and should therefore be put away out of thought, as a matter completed and at an end. But now the time was come, and she almost wished that she had been more definite in her own resolutions.

"Yes, Mr. Saul, I have just done."

"I will walk with you, if you will let me." Then Fanny spoke some words of experienced wisdom to two or three girls, in order that she might show to them, to him, and to herself that she was quite collected. She lingered in the room for a few minutes, and was very wise and very experienced. "I am quite ready now, Mr. Saul." So saying, she came forth upon the green lane, and he followed her.

They walked on in silence for a little way, and then he asked her some question about Florence Burton. Fanny told him that she had heard from Stratton two days since, and that Florence was well.

"I liked her very much," said Mr. Saul.

"So did we all. She is coming here again in the autumn; so it will not be very long before you see her again."

"How that may be I cannot tell, but if you see her that will be of more consequence."

"We shall all see her, of course."

"It was here, in this lane, that I was with her last, and wished her good-by. She did not tell you of my having parted with her, then?"

"Not especially, that I remember."

"Ah, you would have remembered if she had told you; but she was quite right not to tell you." Fanny was now a little confused, so that she could not exactly calculate what all this meant. Mr. Saul walked on by her side, and for some moments nothing was said. After a while he recurred again to his parting from Florence. "I asked her advice on that occasion, and she gave it me clearly, — with a clear purpose and an assured voice. I like a person who will do that. You are sure then that you are getting the truth out of your friend, even if it be a simple negative, or a refusal to give any reply to the question asked."

"Florence Burton is always clear in what she says."

"I had asked her if she thought that I might venture to hope for a more favourable answer if I urged my suit to you again."

"She cannot have said yes to that, Mr. Saul; she cannot have done so!"

"She did not do so. She simply bade me ask yourself. And she was right. On such a matter there is no one to whom I can with propriety address myself, but to yourself. Therefore I now ask you the question. May I venture to have any hope?"

His voice was so solemn, and there was so much of eager seriousness in his face that Fanny could not bring herself to answer him with quickness. The answer that was in her mind was in truth this: "How can you ask me to try to love a man who has but seventy pounds a year in the world, while I myself have nothing?" But there was something in his demeanour, — something that was almost grand in its gravity, — which made it quite impossible that she should speak

to him in that tone. But he, having asked his question, waited for an answer; and she was well aware that the longer she delayed it, the weaker became the ground on which she was standing.

"It is quite impossible," she said at last.

"If it really be so, — if you will say again that it is so after hearing me out to an end, I will desist. In that case I will desist and leave you, — and leave Clavering."

"Oh, Mr. Saul, do not do that, — for papa's sake, and because of the parish."

"I would do much for your father, and as to the parish I love it well. I do not think I can make you understand how well I love it. It seems to me that I can never again have the same feeling for any place that I have for this. There is not a house, a field, a green lane, that is not dear to me. It is like a first love. With some people a first love will come so strongly that it makes a renewal of the passion impossible." He did not say that it would be so with himself, but it seemed to her that he intended that she should so understand him.

"I do not see why you should leave Clavering," she said.

"If you knew the nature of my regard for yourself, you would see why it should be so. I do not say that there ought to be any such necessity. If I were strong there would be no such need. But I am weak, — weak in this; and I could not hold myself under such control as is wanted for the work I have to do." When he had spoken of his love for the place, — for the parish, there had been something of passion in his language; but now in the words which he spoke of

himself and of his feeling for her, he was calm and reasonable and tranquil, and talked of his going away from her as he might have talked had some change of air been declared necessary for his health. She felt that this was so, and was almost angry with him.

"Of course you must know what will be best for yourself," she said.

"Yes; I know now what I must do, if such is to be your answer. I have made up my mind as to that. I cannot remain at Clavering, if I am told that I may never hope that you will become my wife."

"But, Mr. Saul —"

"Well; I am listening. But before you speak, remember how all-important your words will be to me."

"No; they cannot be all-important."

"As regards my present happiness and rest in this world they will be so. Of course I know that nothing you can say or do will hurt me beyond that. But you might help me even to that further and greater bliss. You might help me too in that, — as I also might help you."

"But, Mr. Saul —" she began again, and then, feeling that she must go on, she forced herself to utter words which at the time she felt to be commonplace. "People cannot marry without an income. Mr. Fielding did not think of such a thing till he had a living assured to him."

"But, independently of that, might I hope?" She ventured for an instant to glance at his face, and saw that his eyes were glistening with a wonderful brightness.

"How can I answer you further? Is not that reason enough why such a thing should not be even discussed?"

"No, Miss Clavering, it is not reason enough. If you were to tell me that you could never love me, — me, personally, — that you could never regard me with affection, that would be reason why I should desist; — why I should abandon all my hope here, and go away from Clavering for ever. Nothing else can be reason enough. My being poor ought not to make you throw me aside if you loved me. If it were so that you loved me, I think you would owe it to me to say so, let me be ever so poor."

"I do not like you the less because you are poor."

"But do you like me at all? Can you bring yourself to love me? Would you make the effort if I had such an income as you thought necessary? If I had such riches, could you teach yourself to regard me as him whom you were to love better than all the world beside? I call upon you to answer me that question truly, and if you tell me that it could be so, I will not despair, and I will not go away."

As he said this they came to a turn in the road which brought the parsonage gate within their view. Fanny knew that she would leave him there and go in alone, but she knew also that she must say something further to him before she could thus escape. She did not wish to give him an assurance of her positive indifference to him, — and still less did she wish to tell him that he might hope. It could not be possible that such an engagement should be approved by her father, nor could she bring herself to think that she could be quite contented with a lover such as Mr. Saul. When he had first proposed to her she had almost ridiculed his proposition in her heart. Even now there was something in it that was almost ridiculous; — and yet there was

something in it also that touched her as being sublime. The man was honest, good, and true, — perhaps the best and truest man that she had ever known. She could not bring herself to say to him any word that should banish him for ever from the place he loved so well.

“If you knew your own heart well enough to answer me, you should do so,” he went on to say. “If you do not, say so, and I will be content to wait your own time.”

“It would be better, Mr. Saul, that you should not think of this any more.”

“No, Miss Clavering; that would not be better, — not for me; for it would prove me to be utterly heartless. I am not heartless. I love you dearly. I will not say that I cannot live without you; but it is my one great hope as regards this world, that I should have you at some future day as my own. It may be that I am too prone to hope; but surely, if that were altogether beyond hope, you would have found words to tell me so by this time.” They had now come to the gateway, and he paused as she put her trembling hand upon the latch.

“I cannot say more to you now,” she said.

“Then let it be so. But, Miss Clavering, I shall not leave this place till you have said more than that. And I will speak the truth to you, even though it may offend you. I have more of hope now than I have ever had before, — more hope that you may possibly learn to love me. In a few days I will ask you again whether I may be allowed to speak upon the subject to your father. Now I will say farewell, and may God bless you; and remember this, — that my only

earthly wish and ambition is in your hands." Then he went on his way towards his own lodgings, and she entered the parsonage garden by herself.

What should she now do, and how should she carry herself? She would have gone to her mother at once, were it not that she could not resolve what words she would speak to her mother. When her mother should ask her how she regarded the man, in what way should she answer that question? She could not tell herself that she loved Mr. Saul; and yet, if she surely did not love him, — if such love were impossible, — why had she not said as much to him? We, however, may declare that that inclination to ridicule his passion, to think of him as a man who had no right to love, was gone for ever. She conceded to him clearly that right, and knew that he had exercised it well. She knew that he was good and true, and honest, and recognized in him also manly courage and spirited resolution. She would not tell herself that it was impossible that she should love him.

She went up at last to her room doubting, unhappy, and ill at ease. To have such a secret long kept from her mother would make her life unendurable to her. But she felt that, in speaking to her mother, only one aspect of the affair would be possible. Even though she loved him, how could she marry a curate whose only income was seventy pounds a year?

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Russian Spy.

WHEN the baby died at Clavering Park, somebody hinted that Sir Hugh would certainly quarrel with his brother as soon as Archie should become the father of a presumptive heir to the title and property. That such would be the case those who best knew Sir Hugh would not doubt. That Archie should have that of which he himself had been robbed, would of itself be enough to make him hate Archie. But, nevertheless, at this present time, he continued to instigate his brother in that matter of the proposed marriage with Lady Ongar. Hugh, as well as others, felt that Archie's prospects were now improved, and that he could demand the hand of a wealthy lady with more of seeming propriety than would have belonged to such a proposition while the poor child was living. No one would understand this better than Lady Ongar, who knew so well all the circumstances of the family. The day after the funeral the two brothers returned to London together, and Hugh spoke his mind in the railway carriage. "It will be no good for you to hang on about Bolton Street, off and on, as though she were a girl of seventeen," he said.

"I'm quite up to that," said Archie. "I must let her know I'm there, of course. I understand all that."

"Then why don't you do it? I thought you meant to go to her at once when we were talking about it before in London."

"So I did go to her, and got on with her very well, too, considering that I hadn't been there long when another woman came in."

"But you didn't tell her what you had come about?"

"No; not exactly. You see it doesn't do to pop at once to a widow like her. Ongar, you know, hasn't been dead six months. One has to be a little delicate in these things."

"Believe me, Archie, you had better give up all notions of being delicate, and tell her what you want at once, — plainly and fairly. You may be sure that she will not think of her former husband, if you don't."

"Oh! I don't think about him at all."

"Who was the woman you say was there?"

"That little Frenchwoman, — the sister of the man; — Sophie she calls her. Sophie Gordeloup is her name. They are bosom friends."

"The sister of that count?"

"Yes; his sister. Such a woman for talking! She said ever so much about your keeping Hermione down in the country."

"The devil she did! What business was that of hers? That is Julia's doing."

"Well; no, I don't think so. Julia didn't say a word about it. In fact, I don't know how it came up. But you never heard such a woman to talk, — an ugly, old, hideous little creature! But the two are always together."

"If you don't take care you'll find that Julia is married to the count while you are thinking about it."

Then Archie began to consider whether he might not as well tell his brother of his present scheme with reference to Julia. Having discussed the matter at great length with his confidential friend, Captain Boodle,

he had come to the conclusion that his safest course would be to bribe Madame Gordeloup, and creep into Julia's favour by that lady's aid. Now, on his return to London, he was about at once to play that game, and had already provided himself with funds for the purpose. The parting with ready money was a grievous thing to Archie, though in this case the misery would be somewhat palliated by the feeling that it was a *bonâ fide* sporting transaction. He would be lessening the odds against himself by a judicious hedging of his bets. "You must stand to lose something always by the horse you mean to win," Doodles had said to him, and Archie had recognized the propriety of the remark. He had, therefore, with some difficulty, provided himself with funds, and was prepared to set about his hedging operations as soon as he could find Madame Gordeloup on his return to London. He had already ascertained her address through Doodles, and had ascertained by the unparalleled acuteness of his friend that the lady was — a Russian spy. It would have been beautiful to have seen Archie's face when this information was whispered into his ear, in private, at the club. It was as though he had then been made acquainted with some great turf secret, unknown to the sporting world in general.

"Ah!" he said, drawing a long breath, "no; — by George, is she?"

The same story had been told everywhere in London of the little woman for the last half dozen years, whether truly or untruly I am not prepared to say; but it had not hitherto reached Archie Clavering; and now, on hearing it, he felt that he was becoming a participator in the deepest diplomatic secrets of Europe.

"By George," said he, "is she really?"

And his respect for the little woman rose a thousand per cent.

"That's what she is," said Doodles, "and it's a doosed fine thing for you, you know! Of course you can make her safe, and that will be everything."

Archie resolved at once that he would use the great advantage which chance and the ingenuity of his friend had thrown in his way; but that necessity of putting money in his purse was a sore grievance to him, and it occurred to him that it would be a grand thing if he could induce his brother to help him in this special matter. If he could only make Hugh see the immense advantage of an alliance with the Russian spy, Hugh could hardly avoid contributing to the expense, — of course on the understanding that all such moneys were to be repaid when the Russian spy's work had been brought to a successful result. Russian spy! There was in the very sound of the words something so charming that it almost made Archie in love with the outlay. A female Russian spy too! Sophie Gordeloup certainly retained but very few of the charms of womanhood, nor had her presence as a lady affected Archie with any special pleasure; but yet he felt infinitely more pleased with the affair than he would have been had she been a man spy. The intrigue was deeper. His sense of delight in the mysterious wickedness of the thing was enhanced by an additional spice. It is not given to every man to employ the services of a political Russian lady-spy in his love affairs! As he thought of it in all its bearings, he felt that he was almost a Talleyrand, or, at any rate, a Palmerston.

Should he tell his brother? If he could represent

the matter in such a light to his brother as to induce Hugh to produce the funds for purchasing the spy's services, the whole thing would be complete with a completeness that has rarely been equalled. But he doubted. Hugh was a hard man, — a hard, unimaginative man, and might possibly altogether refuse to believe in the Russian spy. Hugh believed in little but what he himself saw, and usually kept a very firm grasp upon his money.

"That Madame Gordeloup is always with Julia," Archie said, trying the way, as it were, before he told his plan.

"Of course she will help her brother's views."

"I'm not so sure of that. Some of these foreign women ain't like other women at all. They go deeper; — a doosed sight deeper."

"Into men's pockets, you mean."

"They play a deep game altogether. What do you suppose she is, now?" This question Archie asked in a whisper, bending his head forward towards his brother, though there was no one else in the carriage with them.

"What she is? A thief of some kind probably. I've no doubt she's up to any roguery."

"She's a — Russian spy."

"Oh, I've heard of that for the last dozen years. All the ugly old Frenchwomen in London are Russian spies, according to what people say; but the Russians know how to use their money better than that. If they employ spies, they employ people who can spy something."

Archie felt this to be cruel, — very cruel, but he said nothing further about it. His brother was stupid,

pigheaded, obstinate, and quite unfitted by nature for affairs of intrigue. It was, alas, certain that his brother would provide no money for such a purpose as that he now projected; but, thinking of this, he found some consolation in the reflection that Hugh would not be a participator with him in his great secret. When he should have bought the Russian spy, he and Doodles would rejoice together in privacy without any third confederate. Triumviri might be very well; Archie also had heard of triumviri; but two were company, and three were none. Thus he consoled himself when his pigheaded brother expressed his disbelief in the Russian spy.

There was nothing more said between them in the railway carriage, and, as they parted at the door in Berkeley Square, Hugh swore to himself that this should be the last season in which he would harbour his brother in London. After this he must have a house of his own there, or have no house at all. Then Archie went down to his club, and finally arranged with Doodles that the first visit to the Spy should be made on the following morning. After much consultation it was agreed between them that the way should be paved by a diplomatic note. The diplomatic note was therefore written by Doodles and copied by Archie.

"Captain Clavering presents his compliments to Madame Gordeloup, and proposes to call upon her tomorrow morning at twelve o'clock, if that hour will be convenient. Captain Clavering is desirous of consulting Madame Gordeloup on an affair of much importance." "Consult me!" said Sophie to herself, when she got the letter. "For what should he consult me?

It is that stupid man I saw with Julie. Ah, well; never mind. The stupid man shall come." The commissioner, therefore, who had taken the letter to Mount Street, returned to the club with a note in which Madame Gordeloup expressed her willingness to undergo the proposed interview. Archie felt that the letter, — a letter from a Russian spy addressed positively to himself, — gave him already diplomatic rank, and he kept it as a treasure in his breast coat-pocket.

It then became necessary that he and his friend should discuss the manner in which the Spy should be managed. Doodles had his misgivings that Archie would be awkward, and almost angered his friend by the repetition of his cautions. "You mustn't chuck your money at her head, you know," said Doodles.

"Of course not; but when the time comes I shall slip the notes into her hand, — with a little pressure perhaps."

"It would be better to leave them near her on the table."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, yes; a great deal. It's always done in that way."

"But perhaps she wouldn't see them, — or wouldn't know where they came from."

"Let her alone for that."

"But I must make her understand what I want of her, — in return, you know. I ain't going to give her twenty pounds for nothing."

"You must explain that at first; tell her that you expect her aid, and that she will find you a grateful friend, — a grateful friend, say; — mind you remember that."

"Yes; I'll remember that. I suppose it would be as good a way as any."

"It's the only way, unless you want her to ring for the servant to kick you out of the house. It's as well understood as A B C, among the people who do these things. I should say take jewellery instead of money if she were anything but a Russian spy; but they understand the thing so well, that you may go farther with them than with others."

Archie's admiration for Sophie became still higher as he heard this. "I do like people," said he, "who understand what's what, and no mistake."

"But even with her you must be very careful."

"Oh, yes; that's a matter of course."

"When I was declaring for the last time that she would find me a grateful friend, just at the word grateful, I would put down the four fivers on the table, smoothing them with my hand like that." Then Doodles acted the part, putting a great deal of emphasis on the word grateful, as he went through the smoothing ceremony with two or three sheets of club notepaper. "That's your game, you may be sure. If you put them into her hand she may feel herself obliged to pretend to be angry; but she can't be angry simply because you put your money on her table. Do you see that, old fellow?" Archie declared that he did see it very plainly. "If she does not choose to undertake the job, she'll merely have to tell you that you have left something behind you."

"But there's no fear of that, I suppose?"

"I can't say. Her hands may be full, you know, or she may think you don't go high enough."

"But I mean to tip her again, of course."

"Again! I should think so. I suppose she must have about a couple of hundred before the end of next month if she's to do any good. After a bit you'll be able to explain that she shall have a sum down when the marriage has come off."

"She won't take the money and do nothing; will she?"

"Oh, no; they never sell you like that. It would spoil their own business if they were to play that game. If you can make it worth her while, she'll do the work for you. But you must be careful; — do remember that." Archie shook his head, almost in anger, and then went home for his night's rest.

On the next morning he dressed himself in his best, and presented himself at the door in Mount Street, exactly as the clock struck twelve. He had an idea that these people were very punctilious as to time. Who could say but that the French ambassador might have an appointment with Madame Gordeloup at half-past one, — or perhaps some emissary from the Pope! He had resolved that he would not take his left glove off his hand, and he had thrust the notes in under the palm of his glove, thinking he could get at them easier from there, should they be wanted in a moment, than he could do from his waistcoat pocket. He knocked at the door, knowing that he trembled as he did so, and felt considerable relief when he found himself to be alone in the room to which he was shown. He knew that men conversant with intrigues always go to work with their eyes open, and, therefore, at once he began to look about him. Could he not put the money into some convenient hiding-place, — now at once? There, in one corner, was the spot in which she would

seat herself upon the sofa. He saw plainly enough, as with the eye of a Talleyrand, the marks thereon of her constant sitting. So he seized the moment to place a chair suitable for himself, and cleared a few inches on the table near to it, for the smoothing of the bank-notes, — feeling, while so employed, that he was doing great things. He had almost made up his mind to slip one note between the pages of a book, not with any well-defined plan as to the utility of such a measure, but because it seemed to be such a diplomatic thing to do! But while this grand idea was still flashing backwards and forwards across his brain the door opened, and he found himself in the presence of — the Russian spy.

He at once saw that the Russian spy was very dirty, and that she wore a nightcap, but he liked her the better on that account. A female Russian spy should, he felt, differ much in her attire from other women. If possible, she should be arrayed in diamonds, and pearl ear-drops, with as little else upon her as might be; but failing that costume, which might be regarded as the appropriate evening Spy costume, — a tumbled nightcap, and a dirty white wrapper, old cloth slippers, and objectionable stockings were just what they should be.

“Ah!” said the lady, “you are Captain Clavering. Yes, I remember.”

“I am Captain Clavering. I had the honour of meeting you at Lady Ongar’s.”

“And now you wish to consult me on an affair of great importance. Very well. You may consult me. Will you sit down — there.” And Madame Gordeloup indicated to him a chair just opposite to herself, and far removed from that convenient spot which Archie

had prepared for the smoothing of the bank-notes. Near to the place now assigned to him there was no table whatever, and he felt that he would in that position be so completely raked by the fire of her keen eyes, that he would not be able to carry on his battle upon good terms. In spite, therefore, of the lady's very plain instructions, he made an attempt to take possession of the chair which he had himself placed; but it was an ineffectual attempt, for the Spy was very peremptory with him. "There, Captain Clavering; there; there; you will be best there." Then he did as he was bid, and seated himself, as it were, quite out at sea, with nothing but an ocean of carpet around him, and with no possibility of manipulating his notes except under the raking fire of those terribly sharp eyes. "And now," said Madame Gordeloup, "you can commence to consult me. What is the business?"

Ah; what was the business? That was now the difficulty. In discussing the proper way of tendering the bank-notes, I fear the two captains had forgotten the nicest point of the whole negotiation. How was he to tell her what it was that he wanted to do himself, and what that she was to be required to do for him? It behoved him above all things not to be awkward! That he remembered. But how not to be awkward? "Well!" she said; and there was something almost of crossness in her tone. Her time, no doubt, was valuable. The French ambassador might even now be coming. "Well?"

"I think, Madame Gordeloup, you know my brother's sister-in-law, Lady Ongar?"

"What, Julie? Of course I know Julie. Julie and I are dear friends."

"So I supposed. That is the reason why I have come to you."

"Well; — well; — well?"

"Lady Ongar is a person whom I have known for a long time, and for whom I have a great, — I may say a very deep regard."

"Ah! yes. What a jointure she has! and what a park! Thousands and thousands of pounds, — and so beautiful! If I was a man I should have a very deep regard too. Yes."

"A most beautiful creature; — is she not?"

"Ah; if you had seen her in Florence, as I used to see her, in the long summer evenings! Her lovely hair was all loose to the wind, and she would sit hour after hour looking, oh, at the stars! Have you seen the stars in Italy?"

Captain Clavering couldn't say that he had, but he had seen them uncommon bright in Norway, when he had been fishing there.

"Or the moon?" continued Sophie, not regarding his answer. "Ah; that is to live! And he, her husband, the rich lord, he was dying, — in a little room just inside, you know. It was very melancholy, Captain Clavering. But when she was looking at the moon, with her hair all dishevelled," and Sophie put her hands up to her own dirty nightcap, "she was just like a Magdalen; yes, just the same; — just the same."

The exact strength of the picture, and the nature of the comparison drawn, were perhaps lost upon Archie; and indeed, Sophie herself probably trusted more to the tone of her words, than to any idea which they contained; but their tone was perfect, and she felt that if anything could make him talk, he would talk now.

"Dear me! you don't say so. I have always admired her very much, Madame Gordeloup."

"Well?"

The French ambassador was probably in the next street already, and if Archie was to tell his tale at all he must do it now.

"You will keep my secret if I tell it you?" he asked.

"Is it me you ask that? Did you ever hear of me that I tell a gentleman's secret? I think not. If you have a secret, and will trust me, that will be good; if you will not trust me, — that will be good also."

"Of course I will trust you. That is why I have come here."

"Then out with it. I am not a little girl. You need not be bashful. Two and two make four. I know that. But some people want them to make five. I know that too. So speak out what you have to say."

"I am going to ask Lady Ongar to — to — to — marry me."

"Ah, indeed; with all the thousands of pounds and the beautiful park! But the beautiful hair is more than all the thousands of pounds. Is it not so?"

"Well, as to that, they all go together, you know."

"And that is so lucky! If they was to be separated, which would you take?"

The little woman grinned as she asked this question, and Archie, had he at all understood her character, might at once have put himself on a pleasant footing with her; but he was still confused and ill at ease, and only muttered something about the truth of his love for Julia.

"And you want to get her to marry you?"

"Yes; that's just it."

"And you want me to help you?"

"That's just it again."

"Well?"

"Upon my word, if you'll stick to me, you know, and see me through it, and all that kind of thing, you'll find in me a most grateful friend; — indeed, a most grateful friend." And Archie, as from his position he was debarred from attempting the smoothing process, began to work with his right forefinger under the glove on his left hand.

"What have you got there?" said Madame Godeloup, looking at him with all her eyes.

Captain Clavering instantly discontinued the work with his finger, and became terribly confused. Her voice on asking the question had become very sharp; and it seemed to him that if he brought out his money in that awkward, barefaced way which now seemed to be necessary, she would display all the wrath of which a Russian spy could be capable. Would it not be better that he should let the money rest for the present, and trust to his promise of gratitude? Ah, how he wished that he had slipped at any rate one note between the pages of a book!

"What have you got there?" she demanded again, very sharply.

"Oh, nothing."

"It is not nothing. What have you got there? If you have got nothing, take off your glove. Come."

Captain Clavering became very red in the face, and was altogether at a loss what to say or do. "Is it money you have got there?" she asked. "Let me see how much. Come."

"It is just a few bank-notes I put in here to be handy," he said.

"Ah; that is very handy, certainly. I never saw that custom before. Let me look." Then she took his hand, and with her own hooked finger clawed out the notes. "Ah! five, ten, fifteen, twenty pounds. Twenty pounds is not a great deal, but it is very nice to have even that always handy. I was wanting so much money as that myself; perhaps you will make it handy to me?"

"Upon my word I shall be most happy. Nothing on earth would give me more pleasure."

"Fifty pounds would give me more pleasure; just twice as much pleasure." Archie had begun to rejoice greatly at the safe disposition of the money, and to think how excellently well this Spy did her business; but now there came upon him suddenly an idea that spies perhaps might do their business too well. "Twenty pounds in this country goes a very little way; you are all so rich," said the Spy.

"By George, I ain't. I ain't rich, indeed."

"But you mean to be — with Julie's money?"

"Oh — ah — yes; and you ought to know, Madame Gordeloup, that I am now the heir to the family estate and title."

"Yes; the poor little baby is dead, in spite of the pills and the powders, the daisies and the buttercups! Poor little baby! I had a baby of my own once, and that died also." Whereupon Madame Gordeloup, putting up her hand to her eyes, wiped away a real tear with the bank-notes which she still held. "And I am to remind Julie that you will be the heir?"

"She will know all about that already."

"But I will tell her. It will be something to say, at any rate, — and that, perhaps, will be the difficulty."

"Just so! I didn't look at it in that light before."

"And am I to propose it to her first?"

"Well; I don't know. Perhaps as you are so clever, it might be as well."

"And at once?"

"Yes, certainly; at once. You see, Madame Gordeloup, there may be so many buzzing about her."

"Exactly; and some of them perhaps will have more than twenty pounds handy. Some will buzz better than that."

"Of course I didn't mean that for anything more than just a little compliment to begin with."

"Oh, ah; just a little compliment for beginning. And when will it be making a progress and going on?"

"Making a progress?"

"Yes; when will the compliment become a little bigger? Twenty pounds! Oh! it's just for a few gloves, you know; nothing more."

"Nothing more than that, of course," said poor Archie.

"Well; when will the compliment grow bigger? Let me see. Julie has seven thousands of pounds, what you call, per annum. And have you seen that beautiful park? Oh! And if you can make her to look at the moon with her hair down, — oh! When will that compliment grow bigger? Twenty pounds! I am ashamed, you know."

"When will you see her, Madame Gordeloup?"

"See her! I see her every day, always. I will be there to-day, and to-morrow, and the next day."

"You might say a word then at once,—this afternoon."

"What! for twenty pounds! Seven thousands of

pounds per annum; and you give me twenty pounds! Fie, Captain Clavering. It is only just for me to speak to you, — this! That is all. Come; when will you bring me fifty?"

"By George, — fifty!"

"Yes, fifty; — for another beginning. What; seven thousands of pounds per annum, and make difficulty for fifty pounds! You have a handy way with your glove. Will you come with fifty pounds to-morrow?" Archie, with the drops of perspiration standing on his brow, and now desirous of getting out again into the street, promised that he would come again on the following day with the required sum.

"Just for another beginning! And now, good-morning, Captain Clavering. I will do my possible with Julie. Julie is very fond of me, and I think you have been right in coming here. But twenty pounds was too little, even for a beginning." Mercenary wretch; hungry, greedy, ill-conditioned woman, — altogether of the harpy breed! As Archie Clavering looked into her grey eyes, and saw there her greed and her hunger, his flesh crept upon his bones. Should he not succeed with Julia, how much would this excellent lady cost him?

As soon as he was gone the excellent lady made an intolerable grimace, shaking herself and shrugging her shoulders, and walking up and down the room with her dirty wrapper held close round her. "Bah," she said. "Bah!" And as she thought of the heavy stupidity of her late visitor she shrugged herself and shook herself again violently, and clutched up her robe still more closely. "Bah!" It was intolerable to her that a man should be such a fool, even though she

was to make money by him. And then, that such a man should conceive it to be possible that he should become the husband of a woman with seven thousand pounds a year! Bah!

Archie, as he walked away from Mount Street, found it difficult to create a triumphant feeling within his own bosom. He had been awkward, slow, and embarrassed, and the Spy had been too much for him. He was quite aware of that, and he was aware also that even the sagacious Doodles had been wrong. There had, at any rate, been no necessity for making a difficulty about the money. The Russian Spy had known her business too well to raise troublesome scruples on that point. That she was very good at her trade he was prepared to acknowledge; but a fear came upon him that he would find the article too costly for his own purposes. He remembered the determined tone in which she had demanded the fifty pounds merely as a further beginning.

And then he could not but reflect how much had been said at the interview about money, — about money for her, and how very little had been said as to the assistance to be given, — as to the return to be made for the money. No plan had been laid down, no times fixed, no facilities for making love suggested to him. He had simply paid over his twenty pounds, and been desired to bring another fifty. The other fifty he was to take to Mount Street on the morrow. What if she were to require fifty pounds every day, and declare that she could not stir in the matter for less? Doodles, no doubt, had told him that these first-class Russian spies did well the work for which they were paid; and no doubt, if paid according to her own

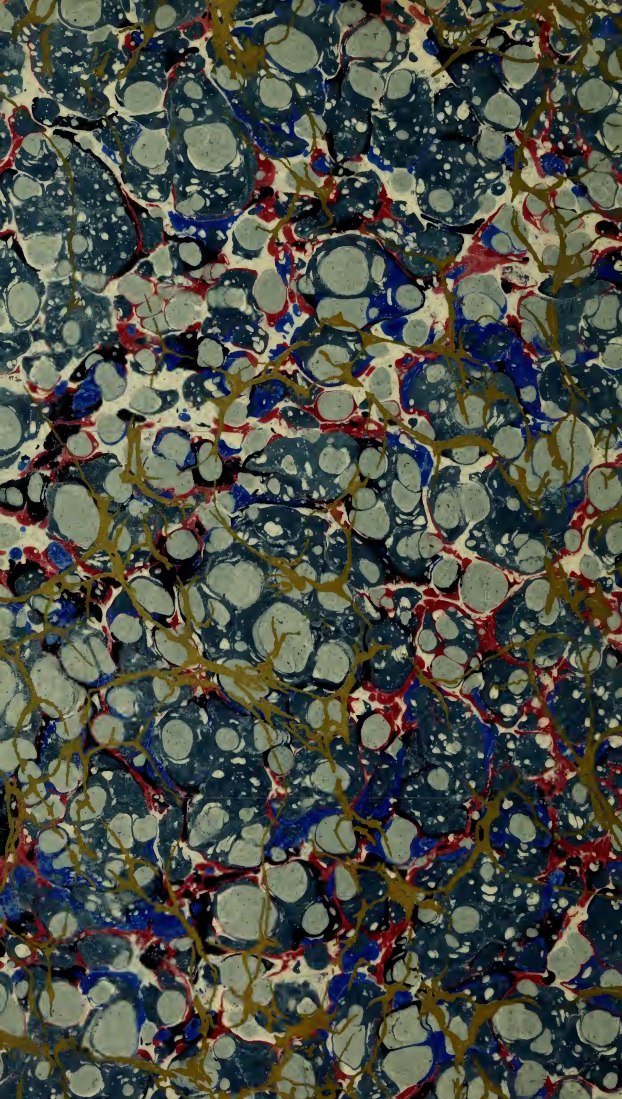
tariff, Madame Gordeloup would work well for him; but such a tariff as that was altogether beyond his means! It would be imperatively necessary that he should come to some distinct settlement with her as to price. The twenty pounds, of course, were gone; but would it not be better that he should come to some final understanding with her before he gave her the further fifty? But then, as he thought of this, he was aware that she was too clever to allow him to do as he desired. If he went into that room with the fifty pounds in his pockets, or in his glove, or, indeed, anywhere about his person, she would have it from him, let his own resolution to make a previous bargain be what it might. His respect for the woman rose almost to veneration, but with the veneration was mixed a strong feeling of fear.

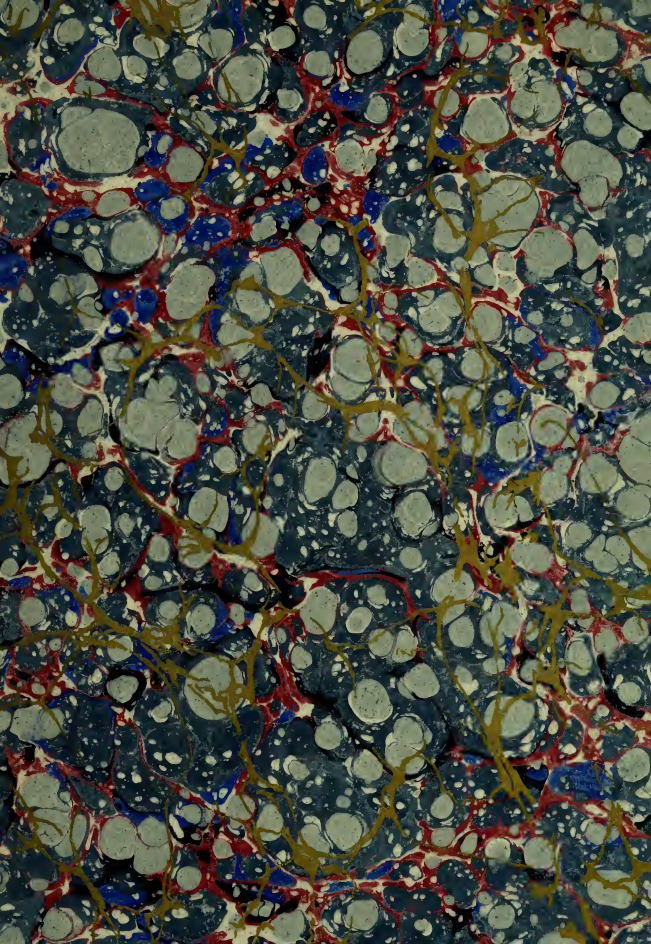
But, in spite of all this, he did venture to triumph a little when he met Doodles at the club. He had employed the Russian Spy, and had paid her twenty pounds, and was enrolled in the corps of diplomatic and mysterious personages who do their work by mysterious agencies. He did not tell Doodles anything about the glove, or the way in which the money was taken from him; but he did say that he was to see the Spy again to-morrow, and that he intended to take with him another present of fifty pounds.

"By George, Clavvy, you are going it!" said Doodles, in a voice that was delightfully envious to the ears of Captain Archie. When he heard that envious tone he felt that he was entitled to be triumphant.

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